

choice

AY 2010 • WWW.CHOICE.COM.AU



Shocking state

Electricity prices are set to rise – the pros and cons of switching providers



Better for you?

The sugar industry has new and sweeter options, but are we eating too much?

Lab tests

Car GPS
Mobile phones
94cm TVs
Clothes dryers
Gas log heaters
Noise-cancelling headphones
Non-stick frypans
Genealogy software



BEST & WORST

Which brands are really the most reliable?

PLUS

Heart health – get yours checked out
Colds and flu – remedies that work
Bread – our healthiest multigrains
Travel insurance – four Best Buys
Domestic airlines – travel savvy



CHOICE
members
strive
to bring
positive
change
to the
consumer
culture –
at CHOICE,
that's our
passion, too

COMMENT

Meeting the needs of members

In the 50 years since we launched, CHOICE has retained its independence and determination to fight for the rights of consumers. This has been made possible by the loyalty of our members. You are the lifeblood of this organisation; your insights inform what we campaign on and write about, and we are constantly finding ways of meeting your needs.

Two of a range of planned initiatives that will help achieve this are our Member Lab Tour program and our new Founders' Club.

I was like a kid in a candy store when I first arrived at CHOICE. Although I had worked in a product testing environment in the UK, the labs were offsite and there was little opportunity to see the testing first-hand. I was both impressed by the quality of the research carried out by our team here and excited by the uniqueness of what we do. I thought if I had derived so much pleasure in seeing all this up close, our members would find it interesting too. And so we launched our Member Lab Tours.

What can you expect from these voyages of discovery? You'll be in safe hands with our Test Facility Manager, John Ashes, who has been with CHOICE for almost 10 years and combines a keen sense of humour with a head full of knowledge about every aspect of product testing under the sun.

Our second initiative this year is our Founders' Club. We're inviting people to be a part of this club if they have been a CHOICE member for 40 years or longer. As a Founder member, you will be invited to a range of events.

Many members who have been with us for less than

40 years have also expressed an interest in joining us at our AGM and other events. If you would like to be invited to CHOICE events, please call me personally on the number below – I happily take about a dozen calls a week from you. You can also call me on this number if you want to come on a lab tour, join the Founders' Club, share your thoughts on how we can improve what we offer, or voice your consumer concerns.

CHOICE members are determined to make the right choice, to be savvy and active, and also help bring improvements to the consumer culture. That's our passion, too. Together we make a powerful force for change.

Nick Stace, CEO
Phone 1800 266 786

PS: We are printing CHOICE on better paper from this month. We hope it will enhance your reading experience.



CEO Nick Stace in a lively discussion with CHOICE members.

CHOICE. Make the right one.

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry.

We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is funded by subscriptions to our magazines, to www.choice.com.au and from other services we supply for the benefit of consumers, such as CHOICE Switch.

CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

SUBSCRIBE CHOICE Plus personal; \$32 per quarter for magazine and full online access: **CHOICE** personal subscription: one year \$82, two years \$153; Company/institution: one year \$132, two years \$253. **ONLINE membership** \$21.95 per quarter.

CHOICE COMPUTER personal subscription: One year \$42, two years \$80 for CHOICE subscribers (usually \$48/\$92); Company/institution: one year \$78, two years \$146.

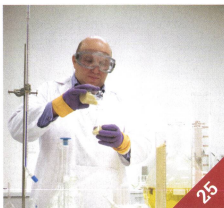
SUBSCRIPTION AND RENEWAL
Call 1800 069 552.

SUBSCRIBERS' HELPLINE
Call 02 9577 3399 or email us at ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

CHOICE EXTRA Free website, www.choiceextra.com.au, for magazine subscribers with an index of articles from Jan/Feb 2002, plus links to PDFs.



14



25



31



58

04 Consumer News

Super shortfall; flu shots; food safety; car cover; mobile premium services; LG fridge recall; interest rates; fast food 'diet' meals

09 Campaigns

Making food labelling laws fairer

10 User Trial

Disposable vs. cloth nappies

11 First Look

Hands-free speakerphone; Google Buzz social media platform

12 Your Say

Antiperspirants; ringtime rip-off; closing balances; Your Say online

14 Appliance reliability

CHOICE members reveal which goods have stood the test of time

19 Electricity costs

State comparisons – and traps to beware when switching providers

22 Cold & flu medications

Do over-the-counter potions help?

25 Sugar & substitutes

Can packaged sugar really be 'better for you' or is it just a con?

28 Multigrain bread

It pays to use your loaf when buying so-called 'healthy' bread

31 Cardiovascular disease

Knowing when you're at risk

34 Family tree software

Trace your lineage on screen

58 Travel insurance

CHOICE's Best Buy policies

62 Domestic airlines

Members rate the best and worst

64 Financial complaints

Where to go for free help

67 Index

68 Hard Word



Frypans
page 54

Lab test

36 CAR GPS

The latest iPhone applications are giving dedicated car GPS devices a run for their money

40 MOBILE PHONES

Safety features and easy-punch buttons mean these models suit both young and old

43 94CM TVS

Our Best Buy gives a quality picture in a mid-sized room

46 CLOTHES DRYERS

Heat pump dryers may be expensive, but can make you savings down the track

50 GAS LOG HEATERS

They give a cosy glow to your lounge room, but your pockets will feel the burn

52 NOISE-CANCELLING HEADPHONES

Which best beat the buzz?

54 NON-STICK FRYPANS

Two Best Buys that could save you hundreds

NUMBER CRUNCH

22.1

The number of additional years (on average) a 65-year-old female can expect to live.

19.2

The number of additional years (on average) a 65-year-old male can expect to live.

5

The number of years by which the average life expectancy of a 65-year-old smoker is shortened, compared with a non-smoker.

MONEY

The great super shortfall

Few of us are putting away the 20% of our salary needed to fund a comfortable retirement.

To finance a pension that pays you 60% of your pre-retirement income, you need to contribute between 20% and 30% of your income to super over your full working life, according to independent actuaries Rice Warner. However, most retirees are running out of money and having to fall back on the age pension within the first 15 years of starting their retirement.

Compulsory employer contributions of 9% are clearly not enough. And contribution rates vary widely between employers, with the federal government contributing 15.4%

to public sector employees' super. On average for Australian employees, 14% of income is contributed to super, including voluntary salary sacrifice. This shortfall is set to be exacerbated as the average life expectancy of Australians grows by one year every decade.

CHOICE is currently researching retirement products such as pensions and annuities. If you have had any experiences with these products – good or bad – we'd love to hear from you. Please email us at money@choice.com.au or write to CHOICE Money Team, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204. UTA MIHM



RECALL

Life not so good for LG

Fridges and power adaptors marked 'return to sender'.

Electronics manufacturer LG is recalling models of its side-by-side door fridges, following CHOICE's discovery (CHOICE, April 2010) that two of its fridges were installed with non-compliant energy circumvention devices. This time, LG has found the earthing screws used to fasten the main earth wires in its fridges may be only partially insulated. LG

says this may "result in a poor electrical earth which could result in customers receiving a minor electric shock from their fridge in rare circumstances".

LG is also recalling three models of power adaptors used with its portable DVD players. The power adaptors may detach from the plug pins and,

if excessive force has been applied, this may cause a minor electric shock.

Side-by-side door fridges recalled:

- Non-Dispenser Model Numbers GC-B197WFI, GC-B197STS and GC-B19ACF

- Dispenser Model Numbers GC-L197HFS, GC-L197NFS and GC-P197WFS

DVD player power adaptors recalled:

- DP392G
- DP351G
- DP450G

If you have any of these products at home, stop using them. Call LG's customer service on 1800 506 154, or go to www.LGresponde.com.au to organise the repair of your fridge and/or replacement of your DVD power adaptor. TANYA FONG



HEALTH

Flu's on its way, so be prepared ...

The flu season starts this month – so if you haven't had your shot yet, act now.

Every year, thousands of Australians are hospitalised, and almost 3000 people die from complications of the flu, such as pneumonia. Vaccination helps prevent infection and the spread of flu throughout the community.

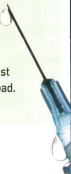
This year, the government has expanded eligibility criteria for free flu shots to the following groups considered to be high risk:

- People aged 65 years and older.
- Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders aged from 15 years.
- Pregnant women.
- People aged six months to 64 years with chronic medical conditions including cardiac disease, respiratory conditions and impaired immunity.

It's recommended that health care workers and people who work in aged-care facilities also get vaccinated against seasonal flu, both for their own benefit and to help prevent the spread of disease. These shots aren't free (unless the individual meets the criteria above) and, if they are not made available through workplace programs, must be bought on prescription.

While this year's seasonal flu vaccine also guards against the H1N1 swine flu virus, a free swine flu-only vaccination is also available. Authorities recommend that everyone over six months who doesn't get the seasonal flu shot be vaccinated against swine flu to limit its spread.

KARINA BRAY





Do you think all eateries should display their food safety and hygiene ratings on the front door? Have your say at www.choice.com.au/polls or write to your state health minister to show your support for improved restaurant hygiene information for consumers, using the letter template at www.choice.com.au/restauranthygieneletter.

FOOD

Coming clean on hygiene practices

Very public restaurant hygiene ratings will allow diners to vote with their feet.

Diners in NSW and Queensland will soon be able to consider hygiene alongside menu and ambience when choosing where they eat.

The NSW Food Authority's 'Scores on Doors' scheme will feature an ABC ranking system to indicate how well participating food service businesses comply with food hygiene standards during inspections (where A represents the highest compliance possible, and C is 'acceptable').

"This will improve food hygiene compliance in those businesses and, as a result, reduce food-borne illness in NSW," says Primary Industries Minister Steve Whelan. The voluntary system will be trialled by a representative group of 12 companies from 1 July for a six-month period and begins statewide from July next year.

Meanwhile, Brisbane City Council kicks off its 'Eat Safe Brisbane' scheme in November. The scheme will award up to five stars, with five representing excellent levels of compliance, two stars indicating poor performance and below this signifying non-compliance. While all food businesses in Brisbane will be audited, the display of the star rating



will be voluntary. Those rated three stars and above can choose to have their rating publicly displayed on their premises and promoted on a website. Four- and five-star rated businesses will be rewarded with discounted licence fees and fewer audits. Logan City Council in Queensland is proposing a similar system.

CHOICE is supportive of bringing greater transparency to what food inspectors do already, but we believe the display of hygiene ratings should be mandatory and stress that consistency is key.

"Poor hygiene in restaurants can result in food poisoning. But currently in Australia it's almost impossible to find out if a restaurant is up to scratch," says Clare Hughes, CHOICE senior food policy officer.

"CHOICE wants hygiene inspection information to be made available to the public in a nationally consistent manner – both on a central website and displayed on the premises – so people can make an informed decision as to where they eat, no matter where they live," she says.

RACHEL CLEMONS

IN BRIEF

KEEPING VITAMINS VITAL

Humidity spikes in bathrooms and kitchens can degrade and reduce the effectiveness of some vitamins and other dietary supplements stored there due to a process called deliquescence (where humidity causes a water-soluble solid to dissolve), a study out of Purdue University, US, shows. Keeping supplements in a cool, dry environment can help prevent this loss of efficacy.

CASH YOUR GIFT CARDS

You can now turn your gift cards and vouchers into cash by selling them to online gift card marketplace Cardlimbo (www.cardlimbo.com.au). You can also choose to donate your gift cards to charity or buy gift cards at a discount of up to 30%. Gift cards that are bought and sold by Cardlimbo include those issued by major retailers such as Bunnings, Coles, David Jones, JB Hi-Fi and Kmart.

CODEINE PAINKILLERS RESCHEDULED

From 1 May, many painkillers containing codeine will be rescheduled to address abuse concerns. Brands include Panadeine, Aspalgin and Nurofen Plus, which had some packs scheduled S2 – they were only available from pharmacies but otherwise unrestricted. Now all codeine products will be S3 'Pharmacist Only' (meaning you need to discuss them with a pharmacist), or S4 'Prescription Only'.

NEWS ALERT

Informed consumers are empowered consumers. Do you have any interesting consumer news to share? Email us at news@choice.com.au.

The disappearance of some smaller banks has delivered the Big Four a 95% share of the new home loan market. And there was little to stop them raising interest on personal loans by 3.4% above the cash rate.

NUMBER CRUNCH

2.4%

The profit banks are making on the interest rates across their loan products, such as home and personal loans.

MONEY

The Big Four get a slap on the wrist

New research by the Reserve Bank confirms the major banks were unjustified in raising interest rates beyond the official increase.

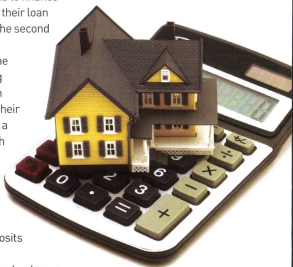
In December 2009, three of the Big Four banks increased their variable home mortgage rates by more than the 0.25% official increase by the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA).

Westpac had the biggest increase with 0.45%; only NAB went with the 0.25% increase. The RBA found that while their funding costs have increased, banks are currently in a better position than before the 2008-09 global economic downturn, so no more interest rate rises above the official RBA increases can be justified on this basis. On average, the Big Four banks have increased their profit margins by 0.20%-0.25% above pre-downturn levels. The average "net interest margin" [the difference between the average interest rate on loans and the average cost of

the funds used by banks to finance these loans] across all their loan products was 2.4% in the second half of 2009.

And it's not only home loan customers feeling the pain. Personal loan customers have seen their interest rates rising by a stellar 3.4% above cash rate increases, and business customers are also suffering. On the positive side, interest rates on deposits and term deposits have also increased.

The reason why major banks can increase their margins is diminished competition, as the global downturn saw many of the smaller players such as RAMS quit the home loan



market. This also coincided with two major bank "mergers" – CBA's takeover of Bankwest and Westpac's of St George. The upshot is that in December 2009, almost all new housing loans were written by the Big Four banks. The good news is that home loan borrowers are taking action, with many now reviewing their mortgages and smaller lenders again gaining market share. Credit Union Australia and AMP have cut their interest rates to attract customers.

Have you suffered any interest rate pain at the hands of the big banks' profit-making tactics? Tell us, and other members, about your experiences at www.choice.com.au/interestratepain. UTA MIHM

AN ILL WIND FOR DYSON

Dyson is recalling its DC05 Motorhead vacuum cleaners sold between 2000-2005. In some instances, the clip on the wand handle can crack, resulting in the hose detaching and exposing electrical connections. Touching these connections poses a risk of electrical shock and/or burn when the vacuum is plugged in.

CHOICE tested and also recommended the DC05 in 2002.

To check if your DC05 is affected, unplug it and check the hose is securely attached. If it is loose or detached, don't use the machine, and contact Dyson on 1800 275 397. If the hose is firmly attached, there's no immediate risk. Contact Dyson for a reinforcing cuff to prevent hose detachment, or to receive a discount on a new model.

For details, go to www.dyson.com.au/support/dc05notice.asp.

TECHNOLOGY

Hanging up on telemarketers

Consumers win with a ban on mobile premium services.

Mobile phone users will soon be able to prevent premium SMS services from messaging them on their phones. From 1 July, says the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA), consumers will have the ability to deny telemarketers access.

It's not yet clear how these services will be barred from mobile phones. ACMA is working on the implementation with operators, where consumers must choose to ban mobile premium services. CHOICE, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) all oppose this opt-in system, which requires consumers to understand what services are available and request the ban.

We argue a default ban on premium SMS services is the best way to protect consumers. To find out more about these services and how to get out of them, go to the industry website www.19sms.com.au.

Meanwhile, if you listed your phone number on ACMA's Do Not Call Register when it was first launched in May 2007, remember to re-register by calling 1300 792 958, or go to www.donotcall.gov.au to ensure you do not receive unwanted telemarketing calls. This registration will expire after three years. ROSALYN PAGE

FOOD

Marketing ploy or the real McCoy?

McDonald's serves up meals for waist watchers.

In a world first, McDonald's New Zealand has inked a deal with Weight Watchers to offer meals that are supposedly ideal for dieters. "We have partnered with Weight Watchers to give our customers more options when dining out and to help guide them in identifying meals they can enjoy as part of a balanced lifestyle," says Mark Hawthorne, McDonald's New Zealand managing director. The three Weight Watchers-approved meals include McDonald's favourites such as Filet-O-Fish and Chicken McNuggets, partnered with a salad or side salad, water or a diet drink. Each meal has a Weight Watchers points value of 6.5.

But don't expect the Weight Watchers logo to appear on McDonald's meals in Australia anytime soon. Weight Watchers' business development director, Chris Stirk, told news agency AAP, "I'm not ruling that out, but at this

point there are no discussions." Stirk points out that McDonald's Australia is a separate business entity from McDonald's New Zealand. "[McDonald's Australia] would have to make a number of changes to ensure they did meet our guidelines."

While CHOICE supports moves to offer healthier food options, we're concerned consumers with good intentions may succumb to burgers and chips once inside the outlet.

"Most fast food is full of fat and salt," says CHOICE senior food policy officer, Clare Hughes. "So it's helpful for consumers to be able to identify healthier choices. But they're only the healthier choices of what's on offer, and most of the McDonald's menu isn't healthy." RACHEL CLEMONS



INSURANCE

Car cover shifts into overdrive

Coles and Kmart, subsidiaries of Australia's fifth-largest insurer Westfarmers, hit the accelerator as the car insurance industry moves into the fast lane.

Hot on the trail of Coles' entry into the insurance market, Kmart Tyre & Auto Service now offers car insurance online as well through its 250 service centres across the country.

The car insurance goldrush began last year when Coles (which for now only offers insurance in Tasmania), Australia Post, Progressive Direct and Virgin Money all began offering car insurance in Australia. Other insurers are upping the ante. In an industry-first, if a car Apia covers is

up to 10 years old and is stolen, the insurer will replace it with a brand new car. The benefit applies to new and existing policy holders, with the maximum payable being \$40,000. However, Apia only provides cover where both partners are aged over 50 and no longer working full-time.

Whether consumers will get a better deal remains a question: the "big three", Suncorp, Insurance Australia Group (IAG) and QBE, all have many car insurance products on offer. CECILIA LEE

Don't expect McDonald's and Weight Watchers to share a table just yet on this side of the Tasman

You'll be paying off the low interest portion of your debt first up – so brace yourself for high interest on any new purchases

MONEY

Low interest, high anxiety?

Shifting your credit balance to another card may simply double your debt problems.

In a bid for new customers, credit card companies are marketing low-interest rates for debts transferred from other cards. Usually, the interest rate for the balance transfer ranges from 0% to 5%, for four months to as long as it takes you to repay the debt.

Switching to a low-interest balance transfer card can be a good way to get a handle on your debt, or to avoid making repayments for a specified time. But for the unwary or the undisciplined, it can be a disaster. Card companies can use balance transfers to reel people in with tempting offers, but then slug them with catches that can create bigger interest bills than before.

Trap #1: High interest on new transactions

After you transfer your debt across to a low-interest card, any new transactions usually attract interest immediately at the standard rate, which is invariably much higher than the low introductory rate. You may have no interest-free period with such transactions. For example, Westpac's fine print states: "You will not gain the benefit of the interest-free period on credit purchases until the full balance (including any balance transfer and any other promotional amount) is paid by the statement due date each month." Similarly, with Citibank's 2.9% balance transfer card, "any transactions made other than with this offer are at the standard credit card rate".

But not every provider treats new transactions in this way. Aussie's card offers the low introductory rate to new purchases for the first six months, as well as to balances transferred.



Trap #2: The "payment hierarchy" con

Repayments are firstly applied to the balance transfer, even if it has a 0% interest rate or some time before the introductory period expires, and even if other purchases and cash advances are attracting interest at higher rates. So, in effect, you'll find yourself paying more interest.

Such practices will soon be illegal in the UK, having been described by one personal finance commentator as "the single biggest stealth charge that credit cards levy".

Meanwhile, Katherine Lane, principal solicitor with the Consumer Credit Legal Centre in NSW, claims the payment hierarchy practice "is a trick most often used in interest-free deals [attached to credit cards] to trigger interest being charged. It is completely unfair."

Trap #3: Luring you into a bad deal

The balance transfer might lure you into a card that's otherwise poor value in terms of fees and standard interest rates. Many have standard annual interest rates of 20% or even higher.

Trap #4: Percentage fees

A fee may apply to transfer the balance. For example, according to Bankwest's small print, with Zero MasterCards there's "a 1% Balance Transfer Handling Fee to a maximum of \$50 that applies to each balance transferred".

Trap #5: Double trouble

You might keep spending on the old credit card, requiring even bigger debt repayments for two cards.

Choosing a new card

Weigh up these features before considering a balance transfer:

- Interest rate and payment period (the table below shows some 0% offers).
- Standard interest rate for purchases and cash advances.
- Annual fee.
- Number of interest-free days.
- Other card features, such as the way it applies interest on late payments (see CHOICE, March 2010). **ALAN DOOLEY**

COMPARISON OF 0% BALANCE TRANSFER CREDIT CARDS

Credit card	Annual fee (\$)	Balance transfer period (months)	Standard interest rate (%)	Cash advance interest rate (%)	Maximum interest-free days
ANZ Low Rate MasterCard	58	6	12.74	20.99	55
Citibank Clear Platinum Visa	99	6	11.49	20.99	55
GE Money Coles Group Source MasterCard	0	6	19.74	21.99	62
GE Money eco MasterCard	49	6	19.49	20.99	55
Macquarie Bank Visa Platinum Card	200	6	19.95	20.95	55
Macquarie Bank Visa RateSaver Card	50	4	12.95	20.45	55

Source: www.canstarcannex.com.au. Rates updated by CHOICE, 15 April, 2010.

FOOD LABELLING

Labelling laws should put consumers first

CHOICE is calling for labelling laws that give consumers the information they need to make informed choices about the food they eat.

A recent review of Australia's food labelling laws has raised major questions about how food labels should be regulated, as well as the role of food regulation in protecting the health of consumers and informing them on how and where their food is produced.

Food regulation plays a vital role in supporting public health objectives. Regulatory decisions influence the food we eat – how safe it is, what ingredients can be used, what nutrients can be added, how healthy it is, the claims that can be made about it and what information must appear on labels.

Promoting healthy choices

Rising rates of obesity and other chronic diseases have increased expectations that food labelling will go further in promoting healthy choices. CHOICE is calling for a UK-style traffic light labelling system that displays nutrition information prominently on the front of packs, allowing shoppers to identify healthy foods at a glance.

Marketing claims about the nutrition content and selected benefits of individual products should also be better regulated, to prevent consumers being misled about the overall healthiness of a food. Should Kellogg's be allowed to promote Nutri-Grain as a source of protein to "build and maintain muscle", and iron to "transport oxygen to working muscles", when it's also high in added sugars and sodium and relatively low in fibre?

More than just health

Many consumers tell us they'd prefer to buy Australian products, or at least know where their food has come from. Others want to be able to identify products that have been derived from genetically modified ingredients, or using nanotechnology. Consumers also want to be able to trust organic and free-range claims on products.

This sort of information is viewed by some industry members or regulators as being something that could be regulated by voluntary codes or conveyed via marketing claims. Yet the food industry has consistently shown that it cannot be trusted to self-regulate when it comes to labelling.

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) has taken action against food



businesses passing off non-organic products as "organic", or making incorrect claims about products being Australian made, owned or produced. Claims such as "free-range" and "organic" will now also come under the ACCC's microscope as part of its enforcement crackdown on misleading green claims.

Enforcing labelling laws

Another issue is whether enforcement of food labelling laws should be transferred from state and territory agencies to a single national authority. We believe a well-funded and appropriately resourced national enforcement agency could address some overlaps or inconsistency in interpreting food labelling laws.

However, it is difficult to separate responsibility for enforcing food labelling standards from other food standards. If the ingredients list on a meat pie states it contains a certain percentage of meat, but in fact the pie has less than the required content, does enforcement rest with the labelling enforcement agency, or the agency that enforces food content standards?

What you can do

CHOICE is preparing a detailed submission in response to these and many other questions. Visit www.choice.com.au/foodlabellingreview to keep up to date with the review of food labelling laws and policy, and also to leave your feedback. **CLARE HUGHES**

The food industry consistently shows it cannot be trusted to self-regulate labelling

NUTSHELL

>> Parents of 48 babies between 7kg-10kg trialled 14 disposable nappy brands. Five parents and their babies tried reusable nappies.
>> A typical baby goes through about 6000 nappies, which can cost between \$4650 for the most expensive brand to \$1700 for the cheapest.

NAPPIES

Cloth or chuck?

CHOICE babies put disposable and washable cloth nappy brands to the test.

According to IBISWorld, in 2008/09 Australian babies used 2.1 billion nappies – a staggering 5.6 million per day. To find the best disposable nappy, CHOICE asked 48 parents and their babies to trial 14 brands of disposable nappies.

As in our last survey, market leader Huggies comes out best for overall satisfaction (see table, below). However, some of the other nappies in our trial which performed well are considerably cheaper than Huggies – which means you can save real money on the 6000 or so nappies a baby uses before being toilet trained.



Our four Best Buys are Snugglers Crawler, Comfy Bots Medium, Mami Toddler (Aldi) and Especially For Baby Size 3. All four brands rated well and are considerably cheaper than the other recommended nappy brands.

Our Green Buy, Bambo Nature Midi, is certified by Nordic Ecolabel and has a biodegradable core with biodegradable starch granules, fully recyclable packaging and chlorine-free material.

machine and line-dried, are the most environmentally friendly option. While the overwhelming majority of parents are using disposable nappies, cloth nappies have made a comeback with CHOICE parents, with one in five of our trialists using cloth nappies or a mix of cloth and disposable nappies. As well as the traditional terry towelling "flats", there is now a variety of conveniently fitted cloth nappies that help the environment and your purse.

For more information about our trial, as well as a full listing of the results and profiles for each of the nappies, go to www.choice.com.au/nappies (free for CHOICE Online members). UTA MIHM

DISPOSABLE NAPPY TRIAL RESULTS		
Brand / product (number of trialists)	Overall score (%)	Price per nappy (cents) [pack size]*
WHAT TO BUY		
Huggies Crawler (Boy/Girl) (44)	85	42 [99]
Snugglers Crawler (45)	74	31 [108]
Comfy Bots Medium (45)	71	29 [56]
Mami Toddler (Aldi) (41)	71	32 [50]
Especially For Baby Size 3 (47)	69	31 [116]
Bambo Nature** Midi (42)	68	66 [56]
ALSO RECOMMENDED		
Coles Dry Fit Crawler (45)	72	39 [72]
Pampers Cruisers Active Fit Size 3 (42)	71	43 [116]
BabyLove Crawler (42)	70	40 [90]
Homebrand Crawler (Woolworths) (42)	70	37 [16]

OTHERS		
7th Generation** Size 3 (41)	69	68 [44]
Moltex** Size 4, Maxi (42)	65	77 [80]
Cosifits Crawler (40)	53	29 [76]
Lullaby Medium (42)	53	31 [80]

TABLE NOTES * Independently certified for reducing environmental impact.
** Chlorine-free. * Price per nappy is based on the RRP of pack size closest to 90 and rounded to the nearest cent. You can make considerable savings if you look out for specials. Snugglers has two pack sizes containing 72 and 108 nappies respectively; we used the 108-pack as it was better value.

Cloth nappies make a comeback

Recent research from the University of Queensland showed that home-washed reusable nappies, washed in cold water in a front-loading washing

CASE STUDY

Cloth nappies on trial

CHOICE mum Janet, who participated in our trial of cloth nappies with baby Leo, has spent less than \$1000 on a variety of cloth nappies for her five children. This compares with a total cost for disposable nappies of up to \$23,250 for the most expensive brand – a massive saving.

Four other parents (and babies) trialled five different modern cloth nappies from four brands.

There were mixed opinions on the tested nappies, so always buy a single nappy or trial pack first.

The cloth nappy brands on trial (in rank order) are:

- Pea Pods
- Itti Bitti All in One and Snap in One
- Baby BeeHinds
- Eenee Weenees



MOBILE FOR THE ROAD

Look, no hands!

Play it safe and keep your hands on the wheel with this light, portable hands-free device.

The Sudio Solar Powered Bluetooth Handsfree Speakerphone is a relatively cheap hands-free car kit that won't clutter your car's console or dashboard.

It's small at just 100 x 55 x 17mm, and weighs only 69g. Not only is the device solar powered – it also has a lithium ion polymer (Li-Pol) battery with a claimed talk time of 12 hours (up to 720 hours in standby), which needs an initial charge using the supplied USB cable connected to a computer, or to the car adaptor provided.



There's a warning to fully charge the battery before using the device, and this took us around three-and-a-half hours. However, during subsequent charges, you can do things such as pairing it with your phone and downloading your phonebook.

The Sudio comes with a plastic cradle that attaches to your windshield via small suction cups. The device tends to vibrate in the cradle, resulting in an annoying rattle. Also, the 'on' light is bright, which could be distracting at night. In contrast, the charging light is so dim it's almost invisible.

The idea is that the solar cell will top up the charge in the battery as you drive, but if you're talking the drain will be greater than the charge and it will run down eventually.

Sound quality is similar to some of the better GPS devices we've tested, which is adequate, but noisy roads might be a challenge. Unfortunately, for the person listening to you, the sound from the device is echoey and compressed. There's no support for SMS, unlike some GPS products, which can also read the message to you when it arrives.

When you receive a call, it's announced with the name from your phonebook, but you have to press the silver multi-function button to answer it. For voice dialling, you press the button and speak the name of the person you wish to call. We measured the 10m claim for connectivity and it performed well, so having your phone in your bag or pocket shouldn't be a problem.

CHOICE VERDICT

While not as good as a dedicated hands-free kit for sound quality or functionality, this is a good option if you're not a heavy phone user and want a light, portable and relatively cheap hands-free solution. **CHRIS RUGGLES**

SUDIO SOLAR POWERED BLUETOOTH HANDSFREE SPEAKERPHONE

Price \$109

Contact www.sudio.com.au



SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM

Search engine seeks a wider audience

Google tweet-talks its Gmail customers, but is it all just empty chatter?

The world's largest search engine, Google, is moving into social networking, an arena dominated by Facebook and Twitter.

Buzz is part of Gmail, Google's popular email system. When you join Buzz, you set up a profile with your name, photograph and a range of information so other users can verify your identity and find things in common. This will generate two lists –

people you follow and those who follow you. The lists become part of your profile and are open to other users, unless you choose to make the information private.

Beyond Buzz, you can link to Flickr, Picasa, Twitter, Google Reader, Blogger and YouTube, to make Gmail a one-stop shop for all your contacts. Whatever they tweet, post, or just express an interest in will appear in Buzz alongside your mail. There are built-in viewers for videos and pictures and a recommendation system that lets you mark things you're not interested in, so Buzz can learn your preferences and filter them out. There's a mobile version, too, running on Android and Apple's iPhone, that couples Google

Maps with your location to highlight local information and posts from people nearby.

CHOICE VERDICT

Does Buzz bring anything fresh to the social media table? It has some nice features – integration with Gmail and links with Twitter, YouTube and the rest make it easier to keep an eye on what's happening; distinct groups of contacts give you more control; and so, too, does the filter system. But it's more an evolution than a revolution – one more way to share your life online. For more, see the May/June 2010 issue of *CHOICE Computer*; to subscribe, call 1800 069 552 (toll-free) or visit www.choice.com.au/magazines. **BEN BRIDGES**

GOOGLE BUZZ

Price FREE

Contact www.google.com/buzz



YOUR SAY

YOUR EXPERIENCES HELP OUR RESEARCH and often let other readers know about scams and rip-offs. Positive responses you've had to a complaint you took to a manufacturer, retailer, importer or tradesperson interest us too, so please email ausconsumer@choice.com.au or mail to Letters, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Antiperspirant labelling stinks

Antiperspirant packaging once listed the aluminium chloride content. One could decide on 10% (for winter), 15% (summer) or 20% (Cairns summer). Now, no antiperspirant appears to display this.

Sally Bayne, Cairns, Qld

CHOICE SAYS Until recently, antiperspirants were regulated as medicines, and labelling requirements meant that the quantity or proportion of active ingredient had to be listed. In September 2007, antiperspirants were reclassified as cosmetics and, as such, all ingredients must now be listed – but not the amount of active ingredient.

Market leader Unilever told CHOICE the new labelling means consumers are more fully informed about the contents, and says if you want to know the aluminium content of an antiperspirant you can contact the customer service line (see packaging).

Message bank madness

I recently upped my Telstra Mobile plan to a \$40 dollar cap, as I was going over my limit with very few calls. Later, I found out I was still going over my limit. A consultant told me this was because I was accessing my messages, a service charged for in my call plan. I explained that I could never answer my phone in time and needed to extend the ring time, only to be told I can't just change it as it's set by Telstra!

The consultant I next spoke to extended the ring time from 10 to 30 seconds. I now know why I could never answer my phone before it went to message bank, and why my bill was so high. It's unlikely I needed to up my plan at all – all I needed was to be able to answer my phone when it rang.

Sally Wallace, Sanctuary Point, NSW

CHOICE SAYS Many, but not all, mobile phone call plans charge customers to listen to voice messages left by callers. But if you find the ring time isn't long enough to pick up before it switches to message bank, it may be worth extending your ring time.

- For Telstra customers, ring **61*101**N#

[send], where N is the number of seconds.

- For Optus customers, ring **61*321**N# [send].
- For Virgin customers, ring **61*212**N# [send].
- For other companies, see their website or ring their customer service number.

EMAIL OF THE MONTH

Closing balance ≠ net debt

I have just finished reading your story on credit card charges (CHOICE, March 2010), and would like to bring a case in point to your and your readers' attention.

I have a Commonwealth Bank Visa card with an interest-free period, and I generally pay the closing balance in full by the due date. Last year, however, I fell victim to a misunderstanding over how the "closing balance" is determined.

My October statement included purchases made between 9 September and 8 October, 2009, and the payment due date was 2 November. On 20 October – after the statement was issued – I had \$36 refunded to my credit card for a returned purchase. On 30 October (three days early) I paid in full the closing balance on the statement, minus the amount of the refund. I believed I had fulfilled my debt.

But on my January 2010 statement I was charged \$94.59 interest. When I rang the bank, the customer service representative said that refunds of any kind aren't taken as payments back to the account, which is why I had been charged the interest – I had underpaid my closing balance by \$36.

She said she couldn't do anything about it, although when I said I'd take my loans and investments and savings accounts elsewhere, she quickly arranged to reverse the interest charge on the next statement. I pointed out that I had done the same thing the following month with other credit card refunds, and she agreed she would also cancel the next month's interest.

Until then, I had nothing but praise for the Commonwealth Bank, but I find this penalty fee wrong and underhanded.

Karen Griffin, Leeming, WA

CHOICE SAYS Thank you, Karen, for alerting us to this quirk in the way "closing balance" is defined; hopefully, other consumers can learn from your experience. It's also worth noting that whenever something like this happens, you should challenge your bank – chances are they'll refund the penalty as soon as you start talking about taking your business elsewhere.

EMAIL OF THE MONTH Karen receives A-Z of Gardening Hints, or any other book of her choice at www.choice.com.au/books. Unfortunately, we are unable to answer all the emails and letters we receive. We may edit or print only an extract of emails and letters.



YOUR SAY – ONLINE

JOIN IN THE DISCUSSION and become part of our online community. Share your experiences, opinions and feedback on the reports we publish daily. Here are some highlights of what members are talking about on www.choice.com.au, and how we're responding.

Weight loss surgery investigation

choice.com.au/weight-loss-surgery

Joanne Barton's opinion:

I was banded in April 2008 and so far have lost 61kg. It hasn't been the easiest road, but it has been liberating. Life at 206kg is not easy. You don't fit into society, let alone clothes, cars or chairs. I still have a long road to travel before I get to a healthier weight, but I have joined a gym and I can move again. My knees don't ache 24 hours a day, I don't worry about what kind of chair I will be offered wherever I go, I don't have to use a seatbelt extension, and I no longer search for the biggest meal on the menu. Lap banding has given me my life back.

Karina Bray, content producer | Many people don't appreciate the difficulties in doing everyday things when you're obese. This leads to depression and inactivity, which in turn leads to more eating, even less activity and more weight gain ... and so the cycle repeats.

Nappies user trial

choice.com.au/nappies

Emma Hall's opinion:

I think the comments on modern cloth nappies (MCNs) would have been more helpful to new users if you'd had users with experience of a large variety of MCNs trial them. They would have given a better overview of each cloth nappy trialled.

Uta Mihm, content producer | We'll certainly consider this when we look at nappies again. While four of our five panel members who trialled the nappies are first-time mothers, only one was a novice to cloth nappies. Mother of five, Janet, used a wide variety of cloth nappies on her children.

Smartphones review

choice.com.au/smartphones

Juliette Reay's opinion:

I have a Nokia N97 and am very pleased with it. I find all the functions and features are easy to use and it is simple to navigate through the screens. I have long fingernails and have no problems using the touchpad.

William Connors' opinion:

I can't believe you have rated the Nokia N97 as the best. The latest edition of *Not Good Enough* is filled with complaints from members saying this phone is garbage and they would not buy Nokia again.

Denis Gallagher, content producer | Our testing of the N97 showed that it performed well across the board. When, like Nokia, you sell squillions of mobiles, you will get some faulty product through the channel. However, the mark of a great company is how they deal with it and, from what I'm reading on the forums, including *Not Good Enough*, it's the way Nokia is dealing with the faulty products that's the big issue. This is an area where CHOICE members can help us (so we can get a "please explain" from the companies) and each other.

CHOICE Social Media

CHOICE Facebook page: Become a fan to see highlights of online content, including our "Can you help?" call-outs – when we look for case studies, or ask for volunteers for user trials. choice.com.au/facebook

CHOICE Twitter: Follow us on Twitter to read about what's hot right now. We recently live-tweeted from the CHOICE Awards night (#CHOICEawards) event and also from the

CHOICE Weddings round table discussion (#CHOICEweddings).

twitter.com/choiceaustralia

Tip for magazine readers

To find out what is new on the site each month, sign up to the newsletter online: choice.com.au/eNewsletter

THUMBS UP!

When **Michelle Grybaitis** of Queanbeyan, NSW, and her partner were bumped off their Qantas early morning flight to New Zealand, the airline gave them a \$15 voucher for breakfast, an upgrade and access to the business class lounge both ways. And when Qantas couldn't seat them together in business class on the way back, they sent Michelle a hamper with apologies for the inconvenience.

Denis Burnham of Rosebud, Vic, was given a new Shimano fishing rod and reel by his son, but the rod snapped the first time he used it. "My son had moved house and no longer had the receipt, so the retailer wouldn't do anything," Denis tells us. "I emailed the Shimano importers and distributors, Dunphy Sports/Fishing Imports, and received a phone call the next day. The following day I received a replacement rod by courier."

Michael Cunningham of Brisbane, Qld, rang LG about some problems with his LCD widescreen monitor. "My problem was very quickly assessed, and I was directed to a repair agent 10 minutes away," says Michael. "The problem turned out to be external – cat spray corroding the screen – but the screen was quickly replaced without charge."

NUTSHELL

>> Brands that perform well in CHOICE tests generally have high reliability rates.

>> Miele is the most reliable brand for washing machines, dishwashers, ovens and vacuum cleaners.

>> Our CHOICE Heritage Award winner, Panasonic, also does well for reliability.

STORY REBECCA GATTO

Built to last

Do CHOICE's recommended products perform better in the long run? In our latest reliability survey, our members reveal the best and the worst.

We regularly ask you, as CHOICE members, to share your experiences of reliability for a number of appliances. This time we surveyed 11 product categories:

- Washing machines
- Air conditioners
- Digital cameras
- Refrigerators
- Dishwashers
- Televisions
- Ovens
- Car GPS
- Vacuum cleaners
- Strollers
- Mobile phones

This report tells you which brands are built to last and which are more likely to cost you in the long run. Our CHOICE lab testing always rates performance and ease of use for new products, but we cannot test their longevity – this is where you come in. Do the brands in our What to Buy lists perform better in the long run? Is there a good chance that a Best Buy means savings years down the track? And could a higher purchase price save on costly repairs?

Our CHOICE experts weren't surprised by the results – the top-rating brands in our tests generally perform well in the reliability survey. So next time you're buying a new appliance, consider combining our test recommendations with our member feedback about the long-term reliability of the brands. >

WASHING MACHINES

Asko, Bosch, Electrolux, Fisher & Paykel, LG, Miele and Simpson all made the What to Buy list in our latest test of washing machines [CHOICE, March 2010]. This reliability survey found Miele, Bosch and AEG to be the most reliable brands for washing your clothes. Maytag and Ariston are the least reliable. Of Maytag owners who said they had problems with their washing machine, 20% said it was with the program selector and 19% with the controls/switches and pumps. Of Ariston owners reporting problems, 28% said they related to the program selector and 27% with electronic circuits.

Around 97% of Miele, 93% of Bosch and 91% of AEG owners said they'd be happy to buy these

brands of washing machines again. All other brands recommended in our last washing machine test fall between 90% and 85% for likelihood of repurchasing.

New washing machines: Around 18% of problems were with electronic circuits, 14% with controls/switches and 12% with leakages and the program selector.

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *	(%)
Miele (1153)	92
AEG (94)	90
Bosch (1049)	90
Asko (564)	85
LG (1335)	85
Fisher & Paykel (3117)	84
Simpson (810)	83
Westinghouse (433)	79
Whirlpool (849)	77
Samsung (373)	76
Kleenmaid (141)	75
Maytag (236)	74
Ariston (193)	69
All washing machines (10,347)	84

* The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand.



CHOICE
ONLINE

In our recent reader survey, we also asked about the reliability of espresso machines.

Check out www.choice.com.au/reliability for the results.



BEFORE YOU BUY

Ask about the servicing arrangements – if something goes wrong, will you have to transport the product to get it repaired, or will this be organised by the manufacturer?

If you're buying a product that is manufactured overseas, make sure you can easily obtain spare parts in Australia.

When you're buying an appliance second-hand, find out first whether the brand is still available. If it's not (as in the case of Kleenmaid), parts may be difficult to find if the appliance breaks down.

Under the Trade Practices Act, if your appliance breaks down shortly after the warranty expires, you may still be covered by a statutory warranty (also known as an implied warranty). This means that when you fork out thousands to buy a fridge or TV, you should reasonably expect it to last. Under this Act, if an appliance breaks down shortly after the written warranty expires, you may be entitled to a refund.

CAR GPS



In the past year, 89% of Garmin, 85% of Mio and TomTom and 83% of Navman owners experienced no problems. In our testing, TomTom comes out on top, followed by Garmin, Mio and Navman.

TomTom and Garmin owners are most likely to buy the same brand again at 91% and 87%, respectively. However, only 72% of Navman owners and 63% of Mio owners are likely to buy again due to poor performance and features.

New car GPS: Around 38% cited wrong directions as a problem, 24% said their system didn't give the fastest route and 22% cited poor satellite reception.

AIR CONDITIONERS



In our large split-system air conditioner test in October 2009, Hitachi and LG made our What to Buy list. However, neither brand did comparatively well for reliability, with 26% of respondents who had problems saying it was with on-board controls, and 24%-26% experiencing problems with the compressor in these brands. However, Kelvinator rates high for reliability, but only rates OK in our last performance test.

Around 95% of Daikin owners are likely to buy the same brand again, followed by Panasonic, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Mitsubishi Electric and Fujitsu, all ranking above 90%.

New air conditioners: Around 22% of respondents said they had problems with on-board controls and 17% reported having problems with the compressor.

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *	(%)
Kelvinator (106)	94
Panasonic (817)	93
Daikin (1898)	91
Mitsubishi Electric (710)	91
Fujitsu (1246)	90
Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (302)	88
LG (488)	83
Brivis (171)	81
Hitachi (99)	81
ActronAir (184)	80
Bonaire (105)	80
Breezair (113)	80
Carrier (185)	76
All air conditioners (6424)	89

* The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand.

HOW WE SURVEY

>> In December 2009, 15,300 CHOICE members completed our appliance reliability survey – a 15.6% response rate. Thanks to everyone who took part.

>> The survey identifies the most and least reliable brands, the major problems with newer appliances, and which brands members are most and least likely to buy again.

>> Products bought from 2007 onwards are analysed for the types of problems users experienced.

These products are referred to as "newer models" and we list all problems, not just those needing repair.

>> Brands recording fewer than 50 responses are deleted – so if your brand isn't listed it's because we didn't have a large enough sample size to report on.

>> Where we report on "problems", the percentage is taken from those who said "yes" to experiencing problems in the past 12 months.

DIGITAL CAMERAS



Digital cameras are generally reliable products. Panasonic is the most reliable brand, with 96% of models having no problems in the past 12 months. Almost all the brands in the table had 10% or fewer problems in the past year. However, with Casio, Samsung or Ricoh, you're more likely to experience problems with the lens, LCD monitor and/or battery.

Around 97% of Canon, 95% of Panasonic and 94% of Nikon owners are likely to buy these brands again, while owners of Ricoh and Konica-Minolta are significantly less likely to buy again (the latter brand because it is no longer available).

New cameras: Around 25% of problems with newer models are with the lens, 17% with the battery and 12% with the shutter.

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *	(%)
Panasonic (1582)	96
Nikon (1234)	92
Canon (5589)	91
Fujifilm (716)	91
Kodak (595)	91
Pentax (574)	91
Sony (1161)	91
Olympus (1522)	90
Casio (143)	87
Samsung (214)	86
Ricoh (187)	78
All digital cameras (13,517)	91

* The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand.

VACUUM CLEANERS

Miele and Dyson consistently perform well in our tests, and are tops for reliability. It's surprising to see Hoover and Wertheim at the bottom for reliability, as we've recommended both brands in the past. However, 48% of Wertheim owners who have experienced problems say they were with the accessories, while for Hoover owners problems relate to suction (30%) and accessories (24%).

For repeat buying, 93% of Miele and 92% of Dyson owners give their brands the thumbs up. Meanwhile, owners of Piranha vacuums aren't happy customers, with almost three-quarters saying they wouldn't buy the brand again, citing poor performance.

New vacuums: Problems with accessories and suction rate high (29% and 28%); 25% are due to faulty parts.

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *	(%)
Miele (1794)	93
Kirby (112)	92
Dyson (3213)	88
Panasonic (152)	87
Volta (610)	85
Electrolux (1152)	84
Niifisk (691)	83
Sanyo (185)	81
Vax (275)	81
LG (236)	77
Hoover (629)	72
Wertheim (1102)	72
All vacuum cleaners (10,151)	85

* The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand.



DISHWASHERS

Miele and Bosch are the most reliable brands of dishwasher. If you're buying a Fisher & Paykel model, it's worth noting that 35% of problems in the past year related to the controls/switches and 27% to door springs.

Miele and Bosch owners are most likely to buy these brands again. Ariston, Simpson, Omega and Haier owners are least likely to buy these brands again, due to poor performance, features and noise.

New dishwashers: Around 26% of problems are associated with the controls/switches, 16% with the pump and 13% with the baskets or racks.

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *	(%)
Miele (1634)	90
Bosch (1160)	89
AEG (182)	83
Asko (751)	83
Blanco (199)	81
Westinghouse (588)	79
Dishlex/Electrolux-Dishlex (1036)	78
Electrolux (216)	78
Whirlpool (230)	77
Smeg (207)	76
LG (427)	72
Ariston (86)	71
Fisher & Paykel (1261)	71
Kleenmaid (162)	65
All dishwashers (8139)	80

* The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand.

REFRIGERATORS



Fridges are generally a reliable product. Westinghouse and Fisher & Paykel consistently make our What to Buy lists, and both rank well in the reliability table. 21%-25% of problems with both these brands relate to either door seals, temperature control or icing-up of food. If you own a Maytag or GE, you're more likely to experience problems. In 2008/09, 31% of Maytag fridge owners who had problems experienced them with water leakage and 24% with temperature control. Of problems experienced with GE fridges, 20% were associated with temperature control and 19% with controls/switches or thermostat.

It's good to see that our top-performing brands in tests, Westinghouse, Electrolux and Fisher & Paykel, are also the brands members say they are most likely to buy again.

New fridges: The survey finds 17% of problems are associated with controls/switches or thermostat and temperature control, and 15% with excessive noise.

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *	(%)
Mitsubishi (76)	94
LG (884)	90
Kelvinator/Electrolux (685)	89
Fisher & Paykel (3622)	88
Westinghouse (2893)	88
Samsung (597)	83
Whirlpool (448)	83
Maytag (224)	72
GE (124)	68
All refrigerators (9553)	87

* The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand.

OVENS

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *	(%)
Bosch (410)	91
Miele (698)	91
Neff (162)	89
AEG (142)	87
Delonghi (149)	84
Whirlpool (197)	83
Electrolux (303)	82
Westinghouse (1559)	81
Chef (674)	79
La Germania (61)	79
Omega (168)	79
Blanco (381)	78
Fisher & Paykel (545)	78
Ilve (289)	78
St George (134)	78
Kleenmaid (277)	77
Technika (152)	77
Smeg (657)	76
All ovens (6958)	81

* The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand.

Miele and Bosch rank highest for reliability and perform consistently well in our tests. We also recommend Westinghouse and Chef, but both rate only mid-range for reliability. Around 27% of Westinghouse owners had problems with the thermostat and 34% of Chef owners with door seals or hinges.

Surprisingly, Ilve and Smeg – normally more expensive ovens – don't perform as well in our tests and, based on our survey results, are not particularly reliable brands either.

Miele takes first place with 91% of owners likely to buy one again, followed by Neff and Bosch. Eurolec owners are less likely to repurchase this brand due to poor performance. The Technika and Kleenmaid brands are no longer available.

New ovens: Controls and door seals or hinges are the main problems, while 19% of owners who report problems say it is with the thermostat.



Miele once again ranks highly for reliability across several types of household products, and also consistently performs well in CHOICE testing

TELEVISIONS



Around 72% of those surveyed have at least two TVs – and it seems bigger is better, with 30% having a 101cm-120cm screen.

TVs are generally reliable products, but for the brands below 90% in the table the main problem is picture quality. In our testing, Samsung, Sony and Panasonic

lead the pack for performance, and these models also rank highly for reliability. Sanyo and Sharp models are generally poorer performers in our tests but do comparatively well for reliability.

Around 97% of Panasonic, 96% of Sony and 93% of Samsung owners report that they would buy that brand again. At the lower end, 61% of Conia owners say they wouldn't, mainly due to poor features.

New TVs: Almost half of all problems relate to picture quality, followed by sound problems and tuner problems.

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *

	(%)
Panasonic (3218)	95
Hitachi (208)	94
Sony (2573)	94
Samsung (11763)	93
Sanyo (227)	93
Loewe (208)	91
Philips (485)	90
Sharp (418)	90
Toshiba (255)	90
LG (1758)	89
Grundig (99)	86
NEC (238)	86
TEAC (192)	84
All televisions (11,642)	92

* The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand.

STROLLERS

Despite a voluntary recall in late 2009 in the US, Maclaren is the most reliable brand in Australia, with 90% of owners reporting no problems. Mountain Buggy, a brand consistently recommended in our tests, also ranks high, with 89% of owners having no problems in the past year. Around 84% of Steelcraft, 79% of Bugaboo and 78% of Valco owners also had no problems. Phil & Teds is the least reliable brand – almost 50% of problems are with wheels or axles. Our CHOICE Best Baby Brand, Love N Care, didn't record enough observations for inclusion.

New strollers:

Around 38% of problems are with wheels or axles, and 19% with the fabric, zips or fasteners. Owners of Mountain Buggy and Maclaren strollers are most likely to buy the brand again.



MOBILE PHONES

Samsung is the most reliable mobile phone brand, with 87% of owners experiencing no problems in 2008-09, followed by Nokia at 83%. BlackBerry is the least reliable mobile phone – of those that reported problems 30% are due to the keypad not working.

Apple has only been in the mobile phone market for two years, so it doesn't meet our criteria to make the reliability table. However, 96% of users would buy an Apple phone again. Nokia also stands out, with 92% of owners likely to get another Nokia when they update. All other brands come in at around 80% and lower.

New phones: Around 21% of problems relate to screen failure, 20% to battery life, 18% to the keypad not working and 14% due to battery failure. Only 4% of problems relate to the charger.

PERCENTAGE WITH NO PROBLEMS IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS *

	(%)
Samsung (1935)	87
Nokia (6374)	83
LG (813)	81
Motorola (787)	80
Telstra (549)	80
Sony-Ericsson (861)	76
BlackBerry (502)	71
All mobile phones (11,821)	82

* The number in brackets is the number of responses for that brand.



STORY ALAN DOOLEY

Electric shocks

Prices are rising, but can switching electricity providers save you money? CHOICE shines the light on confusing contracts and tariffs.

NUTSHELL

>> Switching electricity retailers may soften the blow of rising prices, particularly if you live in South Australia or Victoria.

>> But beware – misleading marketing and inaccurate price comparisons may leave you worse off than before.

**CHOICE
ONLINE**

More at www.choice.com.au/electricity

- Case studies showing savings in different states.
- Misleading marketing – read about others' experiences and have your say.
- Energy efficiency tips.
- The ins and outs of GreenPower.

In Australian electricity markets, “full retail contestability” is a reality for most households. But contrary to the marketing spin, this does not mean you can choose which company supplies your electricity – all that really changes is the letterhead on your bill and the price you pay. Even if you switch your retailer or “billing agency”, the same energy flows through the same wires and into your home.

Leaving this aside, switching to another company or tariff plan may still save you money. Our analysis found annual savings of up to 8% below government-regulated prices are possible, and the difference between the best and worst “market” prices is up to 20%.

Reaping the benefits of such savings is about to become more important, as the impact of rising energy prices is felt. In NSW, an average three-bedroom household using 7000 kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity per year to power reverse-cycle air conditioning and all the standard appliances pays between \$1257 and \$1446 for electricity – if they use GreenPower, they're paying even more. But NSW prices are slated to rise by 20% to 42% over the next three years, with the increasing costs of supplying electricity, as well as rising retailer profits, driving the changes. That bill could rise by 64% to \$2363 over the same period if the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) gets off the ground (the scheme puts a cost on carbon emissions, with households footing part of the bill).

Changing to a cheaper retailer can soften the blow, but you need to do your homework, otherwise you could end up spending more or overestimating any savings. Several websites do the hard work for you, but they vary in market coverage, independence and accuracy. Some electricity retailers' sites aren't much better, failing to publish their prices and obfuscating their plans' real costs.

And the traps aren't restricted to the internet. Doorknocking is the energy retailers' most effective tool for signing up new customers or churning existing ones into different contracts – but complaints about misleading practices and pressure sales have risen.

Switching action plan

First, make an accurate estimation of your annual electricity use. Add up the kWh of energy used over the last year's four billing cycles, as consumption varies dramatically between seasons and relying on one bill alone will almost certainly lead to misleading results.

Next, compare prices. Our State-by-State Guide (page 20) offers tips for your state or territory, including websites for personal comparisons.

When comparing deals, consider:

- **Regulated tariff or market contract?** In all states except Victoria, government-appointed agencies set the standard retail price for electricity – the regulated tariff. In states with competition, retailers can offer “market contracts”, with prices above or below the rate.
- **Rates for electricity use** What you pay for each kWh of electricity consumed. Tariffs are usually set in tiers; for example, the first 1020kWh in each quarter might cost 18c per kWh, with the unit price rising to 21c after that.
- **Fixed supply charges** The daily rate for an electricity connection is often 50c-60c. A difference of 10c may not seem like much, but for small households, paying \$36 more per year in supply charges could negate the benefit of switching to lower usage tariffs.
- **Discounts**, including rebates for paying on time, by direct debit and for signing up online.
- **Contract term** Often one or two years, with exit fees applying if you leave before then. Discounts offered with such plans should apply for the whole fixed term.
- **Inducements** such as loyalty bonuses, free subscriptions and prizes – weigh up their real value before switching.
- **Discounts and benefits available for switching several services** For example, gas and electricity.
- **Non-tariff costs**, including security deposits, late payment fees and fees for dishonoured cheques.
- **Cooling-off rights** If you switch but subsequently wish to back out of the deal, you usually have 10 days to do so at no cost. In Victoria, for contracts involving power connections the limit is five days. >

STATE-BY-STATE RETAIL ELECTRICITY GUIDE

Here's a snapshot of the competition in each state and territory, potential price savings in March 2010, and where to find more information.

- Retail competition
- Fully deregulated pricing
- No competition

Northern Territory

Just one active retailer, the Power and Water Corporation, markets to small customers. However, the NT is phasing in full retail competition and contestability; the last phase of this process – for domestic customers and small businesses – began in April 2010.

Western Australia

While there are four active retailers, switching only applies for large business customers; the government-owned Synergy has 96% of small customers. The Office of Energy reviewed the electricity market in 2008 and 2009, and has considered the possibility of full retail contestability. However, there have been no announcements as to the likely timing of this.

South Australia

There is competition, with 11 retailers and a switching rate of about 17%. Most residential customers are on a market contract (with most having changed to a new entrant); by mid-2008 just one in three were paying regulated tariffs.

The Australian Energy Regulator's 2009 report found SA retailers tended to offer the biggest discounts off the regulated price – up to \$220 per year.

South Australians can compare prices

at Essential Services Commission's estimator – www.escosa.sa.gov.au. Prices vary over time, but 10% discounts off the regulated price are currently available. Using that website, we found that for a household consuming roughly 8000 kWh per year, the difference between the best and worst market prices is about 21%. With prices changing regularly, we recommend you scrutinise the site for the cheapest deals.

Tasmania

Aurora Energy, the government-owned retailer, controls the small customer market in Tasmania. Legislation prevents new entrants from supplying small customers, but switching is possible for businesses. The Tasmanian government has yet to decide whether to extend competition to all customers.

Queensland

By September 2009, there were 11 active retailers for domestic consumers, with 44% of customers on a market contract and the remainder paying government-regulated rates. About 15% of small customers switched retailers during 2008-09.

Competition is mainly limited to Brisbane and the Gold Coast. In May 2009, an Australian Energy Regulator report found average switching savings in Brisbane of \$95 per annum. Origin's one-month-free plan is among the cheapest, with switching savings of about 8% per year.

Queensland's Competition Authority has proposed a maximum price increase of 13.8% to the state's Benchmark Retail Cost Index. If approved, it starts in July.

A price comparison service is available from www.thepowertochoose.qld.gov.au and www.energy.qld.gov.au.

ACT

Two retailers actively market to small customers – ActewAGL and TRUenergy – but others such as Country Energy and EnergyAustralia also have domestic customers.

The average discount from the regulated price is just \$19 per annum, according to a 2009 Australian Energy Regulator report that used CHOICE data. "Low profit margins for retailers mean few are interested in entering the ACT market," says Janey Paterson, an electricity pricing expert who ran CHOICE's energy price comparison website. Nevertheless, by June 2008 about one in five of all customers had moved from the regulated rate to market contracts, either with their present retailer or by switching. Paterson says market contracts with ActewAGL are cheaper than the regulated rates.

New South Wales

Thirteen retailers supply the small retail market, so there's both competition and a default regulated price. The switching rate is about 11%, with the average saving about \$87 per annum, depending on the region. We found the maximum saving, including discounts, is about 8% with Origin's "one-month-free electricity" plan, which gives a month of electricity per year for two-year contracts.

Such savings are not available for all customers, though. "In some northern parts of the state, where Country Energy customers are on old cheap rates, they would be mad to switch," says Paterson. But she says that in other parts of NSW, AGL and TRUenergy have had market rates above government-regulated rates. "Their customers should consider switching, taking into account exit fees."

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) has approved price rises over the next three years, including an increase in the allowable profit margin for retailers. This will enable retailers to offer bigger discounts off the raised regulated price, stimulating competition. But this won't necessarily mean lower prices.

Victoria

This is the least regulated state for tariffs; with government control of retail pricing removed in January 2009, the 13 providers are free to set whatever prices they like. Victoria reportedly has the highest switching rate of any energy retail market in the world. Around 26% of small customers changed during 2008-09.

Those who've never switched could be paying too much and should think about switching. But if you don't have your wits about you, you may get tricked into

an even more expensive plan. Paterson says smoke and mirrors in pricing is a problem in Australia's least regulated state. "TRUenergy sold its 'Value Bundle' plan door-to-door, marketing it as having an 11% discount. However, that discount was not based on a standard retail price, but on a more expensive plan with artificially high rates."

TRUenergy argues its marketing material carried a reference to Value Bundle having a new tariff, and that "salespeople were instructed to inform customers of that fact".

While such practices are increasing, some companies are bucking the trend. "EnergyAustralia is an example of an open and honest plan in Victoria," Paterson says. "Its base market rates are among the lowest in the state, and they offer a fixed-term contract with a flat 10% discount. There's no 'pay on time' or payment method conditions for the discounts."

Consumers in Victoria can compare prices by visiting the Essential Services Commission website (www.esc.vic.gov.au).

NUTSHELL

>> Over-the-counter cold and flu treatments can help alleviate symptoms, but they won't kill the virus.
>> Always check the ingredients list on any medications you buy, and bear in mind that some may have negative effects.

STORY KARINA BRAY

Cold comforts

Pharmacy shelves are stacked with remedies for winter colds, coughs and flu. Which – if any – will work for your symptoms?

More than \$250 million worth of cold, cough and flu remedies are sold in Australia every year, even though there's not a lot of convincing clinical evidence they work any better than a placebo. On the other hand, there's also no conclusive evidence that they don't work. The reality is, most remedies work to some extent, for some people, some of the time. Something your friend recommends may not work for you; and something that worked for you once may not be so effective again.

Confused? CHOICE outlines the most effective strategies for treating your next cold, flu or cough.

What you should definitely do

Save your energy Resting helps you fight the virus in the first few days when you're most affected and contagious.

Drink plenty of fluids to loosen congestion and prevent dehydration. A warm honey and lemon drink soothes

your throat, while chicken broth appears to have anti-inflammatory properties. Avoid dehydrating caffeine drinks and alcohol.

Flush your nose with saline nose drops twice a day to ease congestion and help prevent bacterial infection. Saline doesn't cause the rebound effect of nasal decongestants and is safe for children.

Gargle with salt water (half a teaspoon in a glass of warm water) to relieve swelling in the throat.

Humidify with steam from a shower or kettle – a dry atmosphere exacerbates a cold by drying out the throat and nasal passages.

Suck sugar-free lozenges to ease a dry, sore throat and reduce tickling that causes dry coughing. Medicated lozenges aren't necessary, although menthol or eucalyptus may help your head feel clearer.

Suppress a dry cough with one or two teaspoons of honey – a useful remedy for children over one year old. >

DID YOU KNOW?

What's the difference between a cold and the flu?

Colds and flus produce very similar symptoms, which is why medications aimed at treating them often have "cold and flu" in their name. The main differences are:

- Onset of severe flu symptoms is sudden; with a cold, the build-up is more gradual.
- Flu starts with a dry sensation in the nose and throat and a dry cough; colds cause a runny nose and sneezing, and eventually a productive cough.
- Flu causes a high fever; a cold sometimes causes only a mild fever.
- Muscular pains, chills and extreme tiredness occur with the flu, but not with a cold.

Preventing colds

- **Wash your hands often** Cold viruses are transmitted through contaminated surfaces, such as handrails, doorknobs and especially other people's hands. If you then touch your eyes or nose, the virus may infect you.
- **Get lots of sleep** People who sleep less than seven hours a night are more likely to get colds than people who sleep eight hours or more.
- **Relax** Stress can increase your susceptibility to colds, because of its general impact on decreasing resistance to infection.
- **Keep your nose warm!** Rhinoviruses thrive in the cooler atmosphere of the nose (about 33°C). Cold weather also dries out the nasal passages, making them more susceptible to infection,

so in theory keeping your nose warm in winter should make it a less attractive environment.

Preventing and treating flu

Your best bet for avoiding the flu is to have an annual flu shot. Flu vaccines are reformulated each year to address the most prevalent flu viruses, and are about 70%-90% effective in healthy people. This year's shot includes swine flu (see page 4 for more).

If you've come down with the flu, the anti-viral medication oseltamivir (Tamiflu) can reduce the severity and duration of the virus, and the likelihood of complications such as pneumonia. It must be taken within 48 hours of the onset of symptoms and is only available on prescription.



WHAT YOU MIGHT CONSIDER

Over-the-counter cold and flu treatments and cough medicines don't offer a miracle cure, but they may sometimes help alleviate some symptoms. Bear in mind, however, that you may experience adverse side effects to some ingredients. The main types of medication are listed here, with some examples from top-selling brands. Check the labels carefully, and choose a product with only the active ingredients you need. Many cold and flu treatments are combination products, and you may not have all the symptoms they are designed to treat; or, more commonly, you may not have all the symptoms at the same time.

For a loose, chesty cough: Expectorants and mucolytics. Loose coughing is a good thing, as it removes mucus from your chest. Expectorants increase the volume of mucus in the lungs, making secretions easier to remove by coughing, and include guaifenesin, ammonium and senega. Bromhexine is a mucolytic, which has a slightly different action to expectorants – it thins mucus in the lungs rather than stimulates production.

• Cough liquids that are indicated for “chesty” coughs (such as *Duro-Tuss Chesty Cough*, *Bisolvon Chesty* and *Benadryl Chesty Forte*) contain expectorants and/or mucolytics.

For a dry cough: Suppressants such as codeine, pholcodine and dextromethorphan act on the cough centre in the brain to reduce coughing. However, the effect is generally little better than a placebo. Suppressants should only be used if you have a painful, dry and persistent cough.

Using suppressants for chesty coughs could delay recovery.

• Many cough, cold and flu tablets contain cough suppressants – look for the ingredients listed below left on the label. Cough liquids labelled for “dry cough” also contain suppressants.

• We found some medications, such as *Robitussin Cough & Chest Congestion*, which contain both an expectorant and a suppressant – apparently working at cross-purposes.

For a blocked nose: Decongestants constrict blood vessels in the nose, throat and sinuses, which reduces swelling and mucus formation. They've been shown to be only somewhat effective, meaning you may or may not experience any noticeable difference.

• Pseudoephedrine, as found for example in *Demazin Cold & Flu*, is a decongestant, but it's kept behind the counter because it can be used to make methamphetamine – you'll have to ask the pharmacist for it and show ID to buy it.

• Phenylephrine has been marketed as a substitute for pseudoephedrine (look for PE on the label of products), but is not as effective.

Side effects of decongestants may include increased blood pressure, sleeplessness, anxiety and dizziness. If you have heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure or a thyroid condition, ask your doctor before taking them.

Topical decongestants are faster-acting than oral decongestants and have fewer side effects. However, they should only be used sparingly – continued use can cause a rebound effect, where your congestion becomes worse.

• *Otrivin* and *Dimetapp* nasal sprays contain a topical decongestant called oxymetazoline.

For a runny nose:

Antihistamines such as diphenhydramine, brompheniramine, doxylamine and chlorpheniramine are often present in night-time formulations. They help dry up a runny nose and make sleeping easier, and may help counter the stimulating effects of decongestants. However, they may also make your eyes and mouth feel dry and cause drowsiness during the day. People with narrow-angle glaucoma or an enlarged prostate should avoid them.

• Many “day and night” tablets contain antihistamines in their night-time preparations.

• Tablet products not specifically marketed for night-time use that contain antihistamines include *Demazin 6 Hour Relief and Cold & Flu* tablets, and *Amcal Cold Relief* tablets. These may cause drowsiness.

• Some liquids, such as *Benadryl Original*, also contain antihistamines.

• *Atrovent Nasal Spray* contains ipratropium, which can help dry up a runny nose and is also recommended for allergies.

Paracetamol Many cough and cold medicines contain paracetamol for pain relief and to reduce fever, so if you are also taking regular paracetamol check the ingredients before use to avoid the risk of overdose. Mild fever doesn't need to be “treated”; in fact, it may help your body fight the infection.



Antibiotics won't help you overcome a cold or flu, but they may be needed if a bacterial infection develops

Don't expect much from ...

< Vitamin C, zinc and echinacea have been variously promoted for reducing the severity and duration of colds, and the likelihood of catching one. While some studies have found some benefit, findings are inconsistent.

Antibiotics won't help a viral infection, but they may be required if a bacterial infection such as bronchitis develops. Don't give aspirin to children or teenagers as it's linked with an illness called Reye's syndrome.

When should you see your doctor?

You should see your GP if your fever is unusually high (over 38.5°C) or prolonged (more than a few days), or symptoms of bacterial infection occur. A severe cough that produces mucus may indicate bronchitis or pneumonia. In children, a cough could indicate croup, bronchiolitis or asthma.

Pain in the ears can indicate a middle ear infection. Severe headache, facial pain or pain in the teeth can indicate a sinus infection. Antibiotics won't treat a cold or flu, but may be useful for secondary bacterial infections.

For most people, a cold is a short-lived, albeit miserable condition, although for some it can trigger more serious problems such as asthma attacks, worsening emphysema or potentially fatal pneumonia. ■



CHILDREN: A SPECIAL CASE

A recent review of worldwide research into children's cough and cold medicines has not found robust evidence that these medicines are effective for children, and has found that using them creates unnecessary risks. Some countries, including Canada and the UK, have labelling laws requiring manufacturers to state these medicines should not be used for children under six years.

In Australia, a Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) report recommended that cough and cold medicines be restricted for children aged under six, and administered to children aged six to 12 only on the advice of a doctor or pharmacist. The TGA is currently reviewing stakeholder responses to the recommendations.

If your child has a cold, try the measures listed on page 22. Children don't seem to suffer as much from a cold as adults, but watch out for more serious symptoms (see When Should You See Your Doctor?, left).



DID YOU KNOW?

Why can't they cure the common cold?

There are more than 200 different viruses that cause the common cold. More than half are rhinoviruses, thought to be responsible for about a third of all colds. Coronaviruses are also responsible for a large percentage of colds, but are less understood because they're difficult to grow in labs. You can't identify the virus responsible for a particular cold by its symptoms because they're so similar, and different people react to one virus in different ways.

Unlike the flu, the common cold is not highly contagious, and even if you're infected, you may not have much in the way of symptoms – you may have multiple viruses sitting in your nose creating no more than the odd sneeze. Your immune response, which can be affected by

stress and fatigue, determines the severity of cold symptoms.

White blood cells, which battle the virus, cause most of your misery. They release kinins – chemicals that cause swelling and inflammation of the blood vessels in the nose, throat and lungs, resulting in symptoms such as stuffiness, congestion and a sore throat. Excess proteins and fluids leach from blood and lymph vessels, creating mucus. Meanwhile, fever, fatigue, and aches and pains are the body's way of telling you to rest up and save your energy for fighting the virus. Antibodies are not produced until towards the end of the cold cycle, so they can't do much more than hang around until you get the same virus again.

If it's beginning to look rather daunting for scientists seeking to cure the common cold, it gets worse. Not only is there a large number of viruses to contend with, but the viruses also tend to mutate quite frequently, making it hard to keep on top of them.

Another problem for scientists is that animals (with the exception of chimpanzees) don't react to the viruses in the same way we do. This makes laboratory testing of potential treatments difficult and costly. However, scientists have now developed a genetically modified mouse that can be infected by rhinoviruses, potentially leading to treatments that could prevent some of the more serious complications of colds.

NUTSHELL

>> Eating too much sugar is linked to a greater risk of coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes and obesity, and contributes to tooth decay.

>> Replacing sugar with artificial or other intense sweeteners isn't a substitute for a healthy diet with plenty of wholegrain cereals, fruit, and vegetables.

STORY RACHEL CLEMONS

Bitter sweet

In today's world of health issues and over-consumption, can the industry really justify 'better for you' sugar?

Over the past half-century we've been increasingly sweetening our food supply. The big question now is are we eating too much, and is this affecting our health?

Over-consumption adds empty kilojoules to the diet and increases our risk of heart disease, according to the American Heart Association (AHA). High intake of added sugars – stirred into coffee or sprinkled on cereal, and those in everything from confectionery to tomato sauce – is now associated with increased risks of high blood pressure, high triglyceride levels, and other risk factors for heart disease and stroke. Americans are eating too much sugar and need to cut back, says the AHA. So how much is too much?

A sweet tooth nation

In the Australian Dietary Guidelines of 2003 (currently being revised), the National Health and Medical Research Council states there's no evidence that, for most children and adults, getting up to 15%-20% of energy (kJ) from sugars is a problem.

- Men aged 19-70, weighing 76kg – maximum 136g of sugars (34 teaspoons) a day.
- Women aged 19-70, weighing 61kg – maximum 105g of sugars (26 teaspoons) a day.

At the time of our last National Nutrition Survey, back in 1995, we were eating sugar at about the 20% level – the upper limit of what's recommended. However, this was based on what people reported eating, which is usually understated. The 2007 Australian National Children's Nutrition and Physical Activity Survey revealed sugars made up 24% of energy intake in those studied. A 2008 study of Australians aged 49 years and older reported no significant change for men from 1992-1994 (132g per day) to 2002-2004 (133g per day), but showed that women's intake increased from 118g to 127g per day. So some Australians appear to eat more sugar than is healthy, but without an up-to-date national survey it's difficult to say how the general population is faring.

Where does the sugar come from?

Sugar we add to food ourselves contributes to our intake, but about 80% of the sugars we eat are in the foods we buy, with soft drinks, juices, fruit-based drinks, confectionery, cakes >



DO SOFT DRINKS CAUSE OBESITY?

A usual explanation is that energy-containing drinks are less satisfying than solid foods – meaning the body doesn't register these liquid calories. But more studies are needed to conclusively determine the mechanisms behind the relationship between soft drink consumption and excess body weight.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand, our national food regulator, reported the increased consumption of sweetened drinks, such as soft drinks, is a risk factor in children's obesity.

Whether from soft drinks or other sources, excessive consumption of sugars is linked not only with obesity, but with other health problems such as dental caries and type 2 diabetes, as well as shortfalls of essential nutrients such as calcium, so it's only sensible to limit how much sugar we're consuming. We'll be covering sugar's contribution to dental caries in July CHOICE.



The best approach is to limit how much sugar we're consuming

< and sports drinks being major sources. And most of these foods are low in nutrition as well.

'Better for you' – from the industry

The sugar industry has been developing new products for consumers looking for healthier options, culminating in the launch of CSR's 'Better For You' range in March 2009.

- **CSR LoGiCane** is essentially raw sugar that has had molasses extract sprayed onto it, resulting in a product with half the GI of sucrose. Low-GI foods are recommended for people with diabetes, and there's some evidence that a low-GI diet may assist with weight loss. But LoGiCane still has the equivalent kJ of regular sugar.
- **CSR Smart** is a blend of cane sugar with intense sweetener stevia. It's twice as sweet as sugar so you can use half as much, which is useful for people watching their energy intake.
- **CSR Organic** is made from ACO-certified cane sugar. It might have been produced without artificial chemicals, but it has the same kJ as regular sugar.

Intense sweeteners – the industry again

Controversy has surrounded the use of the major artificial sweeteners approved for use in Australia (listed in the table, below), largely because most have been linked with various forms of cancer, genetic abnormalities and other chronic diseases. Aspartame has been found to cause lymphomas

and leukaemias in rats. Saccharin fed to rats was associated with higher rates of bladder cancer. And studies have shown adverse effects on the reproductive tract of male rats due to cyclamate in the diet.

But as a review from the World Cancer Research Fund explains, artificial sweeteners in studies are administered to animals in massive amounts – far greater than humans could consume. It says the evidence does not suggest that artificial sweeteners have a detectable effect on the risk of any cancer. However, campaigners argue more studies are needed before we can be confident of their safety.

The newest kid on the block is the 'natural' sweetener, stevia (additive number 960, specifically steviol glycosides extracted from the *Stevia rebaudiana* plant), which you'll find as a tabletop sweetener under brand names PureVia, Hermesetas Stevia Sweet and in CSR Smart. It has had its



SWEETENERS IN AUSTRALIA

Artificial sweetener (additive number)	Sweetness (relative to sucrose = 1)	Product examples	Top 5 sources for each sweetener (no contribution to intake)
Acesulphame-K (950)	200	Bundaberg Diet Ginger Beer, Coca-Cola Zero, Pepsi Max, Red Bull Sugarfree, Saxbys Diet Ginger Beer, Sprite Zero, V Sugar Free, Cottee's No Added Sugar cordial, Ribena Light, Dairy Farmers Thick & Creamy Light, Nestlé Diet yoghurt, Yoplait Forme yoghurt, Also found in tabletop sweeteners CSR Smart Sticks, Equal Spoon for Spoon, Hermesetas Gold, Hermesetas Granulated, Sugarless.	Carbonated soft drinks (52%), flavoured yoghurts/mousses (22%), cordials/fruit drinks (9%), confectionery (7%), flavoured milks (5%).
Aspartame (951)	180	Bundaberg Diet Ginger Beer, Diet Coke, Diet Pepsi, Pepsi Max, Sprite Zero, Nestlé Diet yoghurt, Yoplait Forme yoghurt and sold as tabletop sweeteners Be Light (Aldi), Equal, Equal Spoon for Spoon, Hermesetas Granulated, Hermesetas Gold, Sugarless.	Carbonated soft drinks (66%), table top sweeteners (9%), sports, energy and weight management products (7%), flavoured yoghurts/mousses (7%), confectionery (4%).
Cyclamate (952)	30	Cottee's No Added Sugar cordial, Saxbys Diet Ginger Beer, Aeroplane Jelly Lite, Weight Watchers Fruit in Jelly, and as tabletop sweetener Sucaryl.	Cordials/fruit drinks (51%), carbonated soft drinks (34%), table top sweeteners (4%), jellies/milk-based puddings (4%), other desserts/breakfasts (4%).
Saccharin (954)	300	Saxbys Diet Ginger Beer, Aeroplane Jelly Lite, Weight Watchers Fruit in Jelly, as tabletop sweeteners Hermesetas, Sugarine, Sugarella, Sugarless Liquid and found in Sucaryl.	Table top sweeteners (49%), cordials/fruit drinks (31%), carbonated soft drinks (16%), other desserts/breakfasts (3%), jellies/milk-based puddings (2%).
Sucralose (955)	600	Bundaberg Diet Ginger Beer, Dairy Farmers Thick & Creamy Light, Cottee's No Added Sugar cordial, Ribena Light, Red Bull Sugar Free, V Sugar Free, Protein Revival milk drink, Atkins Endulge and Advantage bars, and as tabletop sweetener Splenda.	Carbonated soft drinks (59%), flavoured yoghurts/mousses (13%), cordials/fruit drinks (9%), table top sweeteners (5%), sports, energy and weight management products (5%).

DO SWEETENERS PROMOTE WEIGHT GAIN?

Concerns that artificial sweeteners increase appetite and energy intake, and cause people to gain weight, date back over two decades. Several studies from the late 1980s and early '90s showed artificial sweeteners in products that provide little or no energy were associated with heightened hunger. While later work failed to support these findings, a 1986 survey by the American Cancer Society found people who used artificial sweeteners were more likely

to gain weight than those who didn't. A 2009 review of the literature, looking at the mechanisms by which artificial sweeteners may promote energy intake and weight gain, revealed that most weren't supported by the evidence. A 2010 review reported that epidemiological studies have generally shown a positive association between artificial sweetener intake and weight gain, but more high quality clinical trials are needed to establish or refute causality.

share of controversy, with the US Center for Science in the Public Interest reporting it's been inadequately tested and branding it "President Bush's parting gift to the soda industry", after the FDA issued a midnight go-ahead for the sweetener at the end of Bush's term. It was approved for use in Australia in 2008, but it's not yet widespread in products due to aftertaste (a key issue for the stevia industry globally), although this is in the pipeline.

Food Standards recommends a maximum level permitted in foods before approving sweeteners, and other additives, for use in Australia. But CHOICE wants more frequent exposure assessments, to ensure that our consumption of these sweeteners when consumed in a range of foods throughout the day does not exceed the acceptable daily intake recommended by scientific experts.

IS FRUCTOSE THE ENEMY?

Fructose has received a lot of bad press lately, suggesting it contributes to growing levels of obesity due to the way it's metabolised by the body. Fructose stimulates insulin secretion less than glucose and glucose-containing carbohydrates. The theory is that less insulin – and possibly lower resulting leptin levels – inhibits appetite less than other carbohydrates, leading to increased energy intake. However, there's no convincing evidence that dietary fructose increases energy intake.

However, large amounts of fructose in the diet are known to increase the triglycerides released into the bloodstream following a meal, a risk factor for heart disease. This is an issue in the US, where high fructose corn syrup is widely used as a sugar substitute in processed foods because it's cheap. Naturally occurring fructose in fruits and vegetables makes up a small amount in your diet and is not of concern.

Cutting back on sugar

- **Check the labels** Nutrition panels often only list total sugar, so it's hard to distinguish between added and naturally occurring ones. But you can get a sense for the amount of added sugars in a product by checking the ingredients list. Common guises for added sugars include fructose (also look for "fruit juice concentrate"), glucose, corn sugar, dextrose, honey, invert sugar, lactose, maltose, molasses and sucrose (also look for brown sugar, cane sugar, granulated sugar, icing sugar and sugar).
- **Reduce added sugar gradually** Don't cut out sugar all at once. Gradually reduce the amount you add to tea, coffee or cereal and start choosing less sugary foods. Over time your tastebuds can be trained to appreciate less sugar, but this typically adjustment takes eight to 12 weeks.
- **Watch what you drink** Sugary soft drinks, juices, fruit-based drinks and sports drinks are major sources of sugars in our diets. Water is the best beverage.
- **Substitute with spices** Add sweetness and flavour to food with cardamom, cinnamon, coriander, ginger and nutmeg. Muffins and cakes can usually be made with at least 25% less sugar, and the sugar in stewed fruit and pie fillings can be cut in half.
- **Satisfy your sweet tooth with healthy snacks** Consider fruit, low-sugar cereal or add fruit to plain yoghurt. The best way to reduce sugar intake is to limit processed foods that don't provide much nutritional value, and eat plenty of fruit, vegetables and wholegrain products instead.

CHOICE VERDICT

There are many good reasons why we should be limiting our sugar intake. If the thought of less sweetness in your diet is unpalatable, then intense sweeteners are an alternative. But they are usually present in heavily processed foods that don't provide much nutritional value (such as biscuits, cakes, confectionery and soft drinks), so should not be consumed in large amounts anyway. ■

NUMBER CRUNCH

66% of Australians consume foods and drinks containing artificial sweeteners. The most commonly consumed sweetener in Australia is aspartame.

10 teaspoons – the total sugars in just one 375mL can of Coca-Cola.

45% of all artificial sweeteners in Australia are consumed as soft drinks.

NUTSHELL

STORY DAVID OAKENFULL

>> Not all multigrain breads are as healthy as you might think – look for brands with plenty of dietary fibre (6g or more per 100g) and less salt (no more than 400mg of sodium per 100g).

>> CHOICE taste testers found some good multigrain breads that meet these criteria (see What to Buy, opposite).

Slice of life

Ignore the marketing claims – for the healthiest multigrain bread, go for plenty of wholegrains with the least amount of salt.

On average, Australians eat about eight slices of bread per day, with men and children the biggest consumers. In particular, we're developing a taste for multigrain breads, because they have more flavour and texture than most white or wholemeal varieties, and manufacturers tell us they are healthier. It seems there's little multigrain breads can't do – bold claims range from "five ways to weight management" to "helps maintain a healthy heart" – but in reality, there are just two simple rules: for the healthiest multigrain bread, look for plenty of wholegrains without too much salt.

Value of wholegrains

"Wholegrains" doesn't just refer to the grains you can see in multigrain bread. "Wholegrains" means just that – every part of the grain, including the bran and germ. These parts of the grain contain the nutrients – fibre, vitamins, minerals and a host of antioxidants and other phytochemicals – that are proven to protect against heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. These nutrients are retained when grains are milled into wholemeal flour but discarded in the manufacture of refined white flour.

Unfortunately, most multigrain breads also contain nutrient-poor white flour. Even among the healthier breads in our taste test (see Taste Test, opposite), 40% fall into this category. The amount of dietary fibre is a good guide to the level of wholegrains in your bread. As an indication, wholemeal bread made entirely from wholemeal flour contains about 6.4g of dietary fibre per 100g, while multigrain breads may contain less or more, depending on the white flour content. So always check the nutrition panel on the packaging and choose brands with 6g or more of fibre per 100g.

Risks with salt

Eating too much salt is linked to increased risk of heart disease and stroke. Almost all bread contains some salt because without it bread doesn't rise well or develop the right texture. But most manufacturers add more salt than is necessary.

Health experts have estimated that reducing salt in bread and breakfast cereals by just one-fifth could lead

to a 23% reduction in strokes and a 16% drop in heart attacks. Some manufacturers have reduced the salt levels in their bread, but there is still a long way to go. The industry recently agreed to cut salt back to 400mg of sodium per 100g in all bread by the end of 2013, but this is only 7% less than the current average of 430mg of sodium per 100g for multigrain bread – well short of the 20% reduction recommended by health experts.

WHY ARE BREAD PRICES RISING FASTER THAN CPI?

The price of bread has been rising faster than the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Industry argues this has been caused by steep rises in commodity prices, particularly for wheat and oil. They also claim Asian countries are demanding more wheat-based food products and grain-fed meat. They cite production of biofuel from grain increasing by 25% since 2000, putting further pressure on world prices for wheat.

In reality, however, the bread industry (like our supermarkets) is dominated by a duopoly. You may see many brands, but at least two-thirds of all our bread comes from two big corporations – George Weston Foods (owner of Abbott's Village Bakery, Bûrgen and Tip Top) and Goodman Fielder (Country Life, Helga's, Molenberg and Lawson's brands). George Weston Foods told CHOICE it hadn't increased wholesale prices since July 2008, and only then by an average of 4.6%, while Goodman Fielder told us the price of wheat has levelled in the last six months, resulting in price reductions. Nonetheless, since CHOICE last reported on bread in 2006, the price of some brands has increased by more than 30%.

The cheapest multigrain breads are the supermarkets' own brands (see the table, page 30), but they don't rate as well for flavour or texture as the more expensive brands. They're also nutritionally poorer as the major ingredient is refined white flour, so they contain significantly less dietary fibre and wholegrains.

Our three top-scoring multigrain breads (see What to Buy, below) contain only 400mg per 100g of sodium or less, proving bread doesn't have to be high in salt to taste good.

Which multigrain breads taste best?

CHOICE found a bewildering 56 brands and varieties of multigrain bread in the major supermarkets, ranging in price from \$1.75 to \$5.99. We compared their nutritional value, and our taste testers then rated 16 of the healthier breads for flavour and texture.

Helga's Seed Sensations Rich Wholegrain is best for taste and also scores well for texture, with a "nice open texture, not gummy" and a "mild brown bread taste". Others scoring well were Bürgen 5 Ways for Weight Management Wholemeal and Seeds, Schwob's Bread Plus Roasted Seeds and Helga's Continental Bakehouse Wholemeal Grain. Least impressive were the generic brands from Coles, Woolworths and IGA, which were described by our tasters as "without much texture" and "like wet cardboard". Aldi's Bakers Life Multigrain is an exception, a cheaper supermarket bread that outscored some more expensive brands.

We also included one gluten-free multigrain bread for comparison. Gluten gives texture and it's hard to duplicate normal bread without it, but in our taste test

Country Life Bakery Multigrain Gluten Free still managed to outscore Coles, Woolworths and IGA generic multigrain breads.

Bread on prescription?

It's hard to believe you don't need a doctor's prescription to buy bread when you see claims such as: "5 ways to weight management"; "helps maintain a healthy heart"; "omega-3 ALA for healthy heart function"; "phytoestrogens help support women's wellbeing"; "soy isoflavones to help support prostate health"; and "low GI for heart health". Often, though, these claims owe more to hype than science.

Omega-3s There are two types of omega-3 fats – those from plants (mainly ALA) and those from fish (mainly EPA and DHA). There's now very good evidence that omega-3 fats from fish reduce your risk of heart disease, and probably provide many other health benefits as well. But you don't get the same benefits from ALA from plant sources, such as linseed. This fat may also help prevent heart disease, but you'd need more of it to get some benefit – more than you'd get from a serving of multigrain bread containing linseed. >

TASTE TEST

For each of the major brands we picked their healthier breads, looking for maximum dietary fibre and minimum salt (see the table,

page 30, for details). We asked 44 ordinary consumers (22 men and 22 women), all CHOICE staff, to taste the bread and rate its texture

and flavour. The breads were presented in random order and were identified only by number. Each bread was tasted by 12-13 people.

WHAT TO BUY

These multigrain breads were top scorers for taste and texture. They also rate well nutritionally, with more fibre and less salt than most other brands.



Helga's Seed Sensations
Rich Wholegrain
\$0.87/100g



Bürgen 5 Ways for Weight Management
Wholemeal & Seeds
\$0.57/100g



Schwob's Bread Plus
Roasted Seed
\$0.72/100g

Phytoestrogens in some plants, such as soy and linseed, mimic the hormone oestrogen. They supposedly relieve menopause symptoms and protect against heart disease and some cancers, including breast cancer. In reality, there's no consistent evidence that soy products reduce hot flushes, and no evidence at all that linseed relieves menopausal symptoms. High consumption of soy foods may lower the risk of breast and prostate cancers, but only by a little. For the small amount you'd get from a serving of multigrain bread there's little point in buying soy and linseed over other grains unless you like the taste.

Glycaemic index (GI) is a measure of how carbohydrates affect your blood glucose levels. If there's a rush of glucose into the bloodstream followed by a quick fall, the food is higher in the GI scale. If it gives a slower, gentler rise and fall in blood glucose, the GI is lower. Diabetics should consider GI, but for other people research hasn't yet shown significant benefits – although low-GI foods may aid weight control. Some manufacturers make a GI claim on the label, but most multigrain breads already have a lower GI than either wholemeal or white breads. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

Back to the good old days?

In the 1960s, food technology took over from the baker's craft and local bakeries disappeared. So, too, did fresh bread delivered daily to your door. Bread became a factory product – conveniently sliced, hygienically wrapped in plastic and complete with additives to keep it "fresh" for a week or sometimes even longer.

Factory-made bread is cheap and convenient, but manufacturers are increasingly aware that consumers may prefer the flavour, texture and aroma of traditionally baked bread. Lawson's claims its bread is "baked in the spirit and traditions of country Australia", while Abbott's Village Bakery nostalgically "remembers the days of simple, honest bread fresh from your local bakery".

However, the rhetoric is way ahead of reality, because in our blind taste test, stripped of their faux brown paper packaging, these brands scored less well than many of those breads without pretensions of tradition.

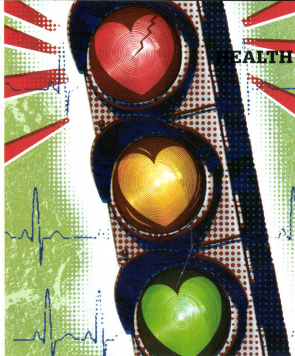
MULTIGRAIN BREADS COMPARED

Brand / bread (ranked by taste score)	Taste score (%)	Texture score (%)	NUTRIENTS PER 100g			Price per 100g (\$)
			Energy (kJ)	Dietary fibre (g)	Sodium (mg)	
Helga's Seed Sensations Rich Wholegrain 550g	85	78	1110	13.6	390	0.87
Bürger 5 Ways for Weight Management Wholemeal & Seeds 700g	77	75	920	9.0	400	0.57
Schwob's Bread Plus Roasted Seed 620g	74	68	1050	10.5	370	0.72
Helga's Continental Bakehouse Wholemeal Grain 850g	73	73	1025	5.9	450	0.54
Bürger 5 Ways for Women's Wellbeing Soy-Lin 700g	70	82	1000	5.5	400	0.57
Coles Bakery Soy & Linseed 700g	68	57	1130	7.5	505	0.38
Abbott's Village Bakery Granary Ancient Grains & Seeds 560g	67	60	1160	6.0	400	0.86
Bakers Delight Country Grain Block Loaf 675g (A)	66	63	1160	3.9	580	0.52
Molenberg Soy & Linseed 700g	65	68	1130	7.5	505	0.64
Bakers Life Multigrain Sandwich 650g (Aldi)	62	66	1000	5.1	450	0.28
Tip Top 9 Grain Wholemeal 750g	60	65	1040	8.7	370	0.60
Lawson's Traditional Bread Homestead Seed & Grain 800g	57	60	1060	6.5	402	0.50
Country Life Bakery Multigrain Gluten Free 510g	52	58	1020	8.2	390	1.12
Coles Smart Buy Multigrain 650g	51	52	1030	4.4	420	0.28
Woolworths Bakehouse Multigrain Sandwich 650g	51	48	1040	4.8	400	0.38
IGA Baker's Oven Multigrain Sandwich 650g	50	55	1030	4.4	420	0.44

USING THE TABLE Nutrients based on information on the label. **Prices** Based on prices we paid in Sydney in March 2010. **(A)** Bakers Delight makes other multigrain breads with more fibre and less salt, but this was the only one available at the time of purchase.

NUTSHELL

- >> Disease of the cardiovascular system has been linked to a number of life-threatening conditions.
- >> The best way of assessing your CVD risk is to look at the interaction of a number of factors.



If you're aged over 45, it's time to get your cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk checked. While experts recommend the so-called 'absolute risk' approach, its take-up by GPs has been patchy. CHOICE outlines the virtues of this way of weighing up your risk with an action plan for cardiovascular health.

The absolute risk approach

Cardiovascular health – which means healthy blood vessels throughout your body – greatly reduces the risk of heart attack, stroke, kidney disease, eye diseases and circulatory problems. Even Alzheimer's disease may be linked to the health of the minute blood vessels in the brain.

Control of CVD has traditionally focused on single risk factors, such as high cholesterol or being overweight. This is the 'relative risk' approach, where a relative risk of, say 2, for a risk factor means you're twice as likely to develop CVD as someone without that factor.

But the absolute risk approach, first used in the 1990s, recognises that several risk factors contribute to CVD and their combined effect is greater than the sum of the individual parts. This approach takes a person's age, sex, cholesterol levels, blood pressure, diabetes status and smoking status and applies these to the Cardiovascular Risk Charts. From this, you (or your GP) arrive at your absolute risk of a CVD event (see Jargon Buster, page 32) in the next five years. The risk is expressed as a percentage (eg '20% chance of a CVD event in next five years').

How to find the CVD risk charts

To find the charts, go to the Heart Foundation website, www.heartfoundation.org.au, and search for 'cardiovascular risk charts'. (Then click on the search result '[PDF] Australian cardiovascular risk charts'.) The charts need to be printed in colour to be effective. For a DIY assessment, you must know your blood pressure, total cholesterol-to-HDL ratio, and asymptomatic diabetes status.

STORY MARTIN BRAY & DR KERRY KIRKE

Go with the flow

Time to get your cardiovascular health checked? The benefits extend well beyond avoiding heart disease and stroke – but many GPs' approach to testing can be patchy.

Ask your GP to give you an absolute CVD risk assessment as part of your regular health check if you are over 45. You can then have a cardiovascular health plan (see Your Cardiovascular Action Plan, page 33) that may aim to modify two or three risk factors rather than just, say, lowering your cholesterol. You can work to achieve the lowest risk possible. For people at high or very high risk according to the chart (a five-year CVD event risk that exceeds 15%), interventions to reduce the risk should begin at once. The risk charts, developed from data collected by the Framingham Heart Study in the US, do not take into >

CASE STUDY

Know your entitlements

As an experienced nurse, Kathryn is aware of the importance of family history in indicating disease risk. Her father had a heart attack at 42 and a fatal heart attack at 58. On family history alone, Kathryn is considered at 'very high risk' of CVD. Kathryn knew that she should aim for very low LDL cholesterol, and that the cholesterol-lowering statins can be beneficial as a preventative action. She knew the risks associated with their use are low if liver function is not affected. Kathryn also knew she was eligible for the PBS subsidy immediately, without attempts at 'diet therapy' to reduce cholesterol levels. She asked two GPs for a prescription without success, because her cholesterol levels were 'reasonable', and they 'could not find the entitlements information'. She then downloaded the PBS prescribing guidelines and visited a third GP who gave her the prescription immediately.



The education of GPs to increase their use of the absolute risk approach to CVD is ongoing

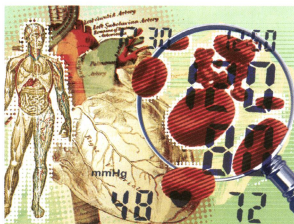
JARGON BUSTER

- **CVD event** means new angina (heart pain), a heart attack (damage to the heart caused by a blocked heart artery), stroke, peripheral vascular disease or CVD-related death.
- **Stroke** refers to the blockage or bursting of an artery taking blood to the brain. It can be minor with temporary symptoms, which is called a 'transient ischaemic attack' or TIA.
- **Vascular** refers to blood vessels.
- **Coronary heart disease (CHD)** is the full name for heart disease.
- **Cardiovascular disease (CVD)** refers collectively to CHD, stroke, and arterial disease in other parts of the body such as peripheral arterial disease and renovascular (kidney) disease.
- **Atherosclerosis** is sometimes used as an alternative to CVD. It is a more descriptive name, alluding to the thickening and hardening of the blood vessel walls, which causes CVD.
- **Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)** is the federal government program that determines the eligibility guidelines for government-subsidised medication.
- **Body Mass Index (BMI)** is a measure of overweight. It is a person's weight divided by height squared (kg/m^2). An index of <18.5 is underweight, 18.5 to <25 is ideal, 25 to <30 is overweight and 30+ is obese.
- **Waist circumference**, at belly button level, of 94cm-101cm in men and 80cm-87cm in women represents overweight, and above 101cm and 87cm, respectively, is a measure of obesity.
- **Waist-to-hip ratio (WHR)** gives a measure of central or abdominal fat relative to peripheral fat. The waist is measured at belly button level and the hips at maximum circumference (see opposite).

< account being overweight, a lack of exercise or family history of heart disease. However, inactivity and being overweight have strong indirect influences on your result, because they affect cholesterol levels, blood pressure and risk for diabetes. Future research may well conclude that a CVD five-year risk percentage should be increased when body fat exceeds a certain level.

GPs drag the chain

The National Vascular Disease Prevention Alliance claims there is a low level of understanding and use of absolute risk tools by GPs. A 2008 study showed a nominal uptake of 60%, but when patients were classified as at 'high risk', the usefulness of the charts was often



discounted, and about two-thirds of these patients were not prescribed medication to lower their blood pressure and cholesterol.

However, current GP guidelines recommend the absolute risk approach to CVD, and, in 2009, the Heart Foundation carried out extensive GP education. The New Zealand Ministry of Health bluntly states: "All treatment decisions should be based on an individual's five-year absolute cardiovascular risk", which "replaces decision making based on individual risk factors".

Understanding your risk factors

When it comes to CVD, the risk factors of age, sex, family history of premature CVD, ethnicity and social status are outside your control. Family history means a first-degree relative (parent or sibling) has had a stroke or a heart attack, before 55 for men and 65 for women.

But factors you can influence are high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol and blood fats (lipids), smoking, physical inactivity, overweight/obesity, diabetes, excessive use of alcohol, and stress.

Blood pressure (BP) should be recorded for adults aged 18 to 50 every two years, provided systolic (heart pumping) pressure remains less than 120 and diastolic (heart relaxing) pressure remains less than 80. If your BP is higher than that, you need more frequent checking. Gone forever are the days when an estimate of 'normal' systolic BP came from adding your age in years to 100. Easy-to-use home BP monitoring devices are reasonably accurate and readily available from pharmacies for less than \$100.

Cholesterol levels in the blood are affected by diet, genetics and exercise. Saturated animal fats and some cooking oils, such as the palm oil used by some fast food chains, are major contributors to cholesterol build-up. How individuals handle dietary fats depends on their genetics, and the results of lifestyle changes on cholesterol levels can be disappointing. Adopting the

YOUR CARDIOVASCULAR ACTION PLAN

- 1. Blood lipid (cholesterol) monitoring** Use diet, and medication if necessary, to achieve your goals.
- 2. Blood pressure monitoring** Use exercise, diet, reduced salt intake, and medication if necessary, to achieve your goals.
- 3. Diabetes screening** for hidden early diabetes. Good diet, exercise and weight control can keep type 2 diabetes at bay.
- 4. Stop smoking** Ask your GP for help, which may include medication, or call the Quitline on 13 78 48.
- 5. Absolute CVD risk assessment** Assess the combined impact of the above four factors with your GP. This applies to people aged 45 to 74 without a known history of CVD. For low risk (less than 10% risk of a CVD event in the next five years), recheck every two years. For moderate risk (10% to 15% risk of a CVD event in the next five years), review every six to 12 months. For high or very high risk (over 15%), review is according to clinical requirements.
- 6. Weight control** If weight loss is difficult for you, physical activity can still provide real health benefits for overweight people.
- 7. Regular exercise** Ideally, 30 minutes on most days with enough intensity to make you 'huff and puff'.
- 8. Family history assessment** Medication may be suggested even if other risk factors are good (see Case Study, page 31).
- 9. The 'stress factor'** should figure in any life decisions that you may make. High stress levels have been linked to increased risk of both heart attack and stroke.

NHMRC Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults, exercising vigorously and frequently, and maintaining a healthy weight will only reduce cholesterol by up to 30%. Fortunately, some very effective prescription medicines, such as statins, lower blood lipids.

When your GP requests a blood lipid test from a laboratory, your results and a 'normal' range (which may differ slightly between laboratories) are both provided. These 'normal ranges' were those used by the SA Institute of Medical and Veterinary Science in 2009:

Total triglycerides	0.3-2.0 mmol/L
Total cholesterol	< 5.5
High Density Lipoprotein (HDL)	0.9-2.0
Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL)	< 3.7
Total cholesterol/HDL ratio	< 5.0

(The National Heart Foundation, in 2001, recommended a total cholesterol of < 4mmol/L.)

To find your CVD risk, the chart requires your total cholesterol-to-HDL ratio (total cholesterol divided by HDL). HDL is the 'good' cholesterol, since it reduces CVD risk. LDL is the 'bad' cholesterol as it lays down fat in blood vessel walls. The lower your LDL levels are the better.

Overweight can be assessed using BMI, waist circumference and waist-to-hip ratio (WHR – see Jargon Buster, opposite). The build-up of body fat in and around the abdomen, rather than on your thighs and buttocks, may be a better predictor of future CVD than BMI, so waist circumference or WHR may be more accurate indicators.

FIRST AID – KNOW THE SYMPTOMS AND LIMIT DAMAGE

STROKE Use the **FAST** test:

Facial weakness – can the person still smile?

Arm weakness – can the person raise both arms?

Speech – can the person speak clearly and logically and understand what you say?

Time to act – call 000.

HEART ATTACK The classic symptom is a heavy, tight chest, as if an elephant is sitting on it. But the signs of a heart attack may be less obvious – pain or heaviness in the arms (particularly the left arm), pain in the jaw, neck, back or shoulder, or a choking feeling in the throat. Other symptoms can be shortness of breath, nausea, a dizzy or light-headed feeling or a cold sweat. Act fast and call 000.

The August 2006 edition of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* asserts that if WHR was to be used instead of BMI, the number of people considered to be at risk of CVD would triple. The WHR figures below are adapted from that journal. ■

CVD Risk	Men	Women
Low risk	<0.96	<0.81
Moderate risk	0.96 – 1.0	0.81 – 0.85
High risk	>1.0	>0.85

DID YOU KNOW?

Medication that lowers cholesterol is very effective, with minimal side effects for most people. So it is hugely popular, with 10.5 million prescriptions for the brand Lipitor alone in 2008. The federal government, through the PBS, has set eligibility criteria for subsidised prescriptions. View this at: www.nps.org.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/23717/pbs_lmd_criteria.pdf



STORY ZARA BAXTER

Shaking the family tree

We test computer programs that will help you trace your lineage.

NUTSHELL

>> Family tree software organises your family history for sharing or printing.
>> Look for software that will let you add pictures, memos, voice recordings and other materials.

Researching your family history used to mean trips to records offices, archives and even graveyards. But now the internet can help people trace their roots using genealogy websites such as www.genesreunited.com.au and www.ancestry.com.au, or historical records, such as the 1911 UK census (www.1911census.co.uk). While Australian online records are less complete than those of other countries, there's plenty of material to get you started on your family tree.

Collecting family history information is challenging enough, but organising this into a family tree can be overwhelming. Fortunately, dedicated programs can store details of names, dates, photographs and family stories in a single file on your computer and then present

the information as printed reports and charts to share with your family.

Websites such as www.genesreunited.com.au allow you to build your tree online and make contact with other users who appear to share ancestors with you. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive; you can start to build a tree online and then download it to use the extra features in a family history program, or upload the data you have already stored in a program.

CHOICE looked at nine packages, weighing up their features and ease of use, and evaluated which best serve the needs of Australian genealogists. Below are our What to Buys.

For the complete feature, see *CHOICE Computer* January/February 2010. To subscribe, call 1800 069 552. ■

WHAT TO BUY



92% Family Historian 4
Australian and New Zealand Deluxe Edition

PRICE \$99.95 (\$55 download)

FREE TRIAL 30 days

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent charts and reports.
- Good manual and instructions.
- Easy to get started and enter information.
- Easy to share family tree.
- Exports to PDF.
- Provides functionality for website and CD creation.
- 90-day www.vitalworldrecords.com.au trial.

BAD POINTS

- Research aids are minimal.



89% Reunion 9
for Mac

PRICE \$149.50

FREE TRIAL Demo limited to 50 entries

GOOD POINTS

- Good charts and reports.
- Good manual and instructions.
- Easy to get started and enter information.
- Excellent for recording sources, notes and multimedia.
- Can associate pictures, sound, video, PDF and text to "people", "families" and "sources".

BAD POINTS

- Can't save reports to PDF.
- Can't create a website.
- No research tools.



79% Family Tree Maker 2010
Deluxe Australia and New Zealand Edition

PRICE \$59.95

FREE TRIAL No

GOOD POINTS

- Good charts and reports.
- Good manual and instructions.
- Easy to get started and enter information.
- Good sources and citations.
- Can add pictures, sound and video to sources.
- Provides functionality to print a book.
- 90-day www.ancestry.com.au trial.

BAD POINTS

- Interface is sometimes unintuitive.
- Screens can appear cluttered.

DID YOU KNOW?

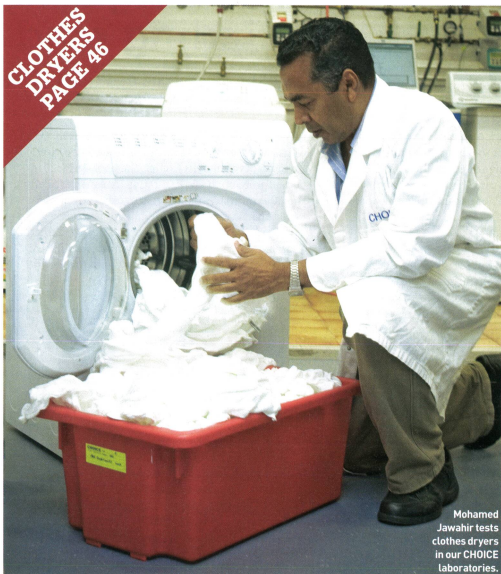
Local family history societies can put you in contact with people who have years of experience and access to resources you may not have found.

FOR MORE PRODUCT TESTS GO TO WWW.CHOICE.COM.AU

Lab tests

Home entertainment, whitegoods, household and personal appliances – they're all tested here.

CLOTHES
DRYERS
PAGE 46



Mohamed
Jawahir tests
clothes dryers
in our CHOICE
laboratories.

Inside

36 Car GPS



40 Mobile phones



Plus

43 94cm TVs

46 Clothes dryers

50 Gas log heaters

52 Noise-cancelling
headphones

54 Non-stick frypans

CHOICE. Make the right one.

CHOICE has its own testing laboratories, where experienced technical staff put products through their paces. We use test methods from Australian standards, and we develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, to maintain our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

CHOICE SHOPPER For the best deal on products where you see this logo, call 1300 360 655. Have the model name and number, the price you've been quoted and your CHOICE personal subscriber number.

CHOICE ONLINE / CHOICE VIDEO When you see one of these headings, there is more information about this story at www.choice.com.au.

CHOICE BEST BUY Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every product test report includes Best Buys.

BEST
BUY

CHOICE GREEN BUY Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance at a comparatively low price. Not every test report has Green Buys.

GREEN
BUY



STORY DENIS GALLAGHER

The long and winding road

Are the days of the dedicated car GPS numbered?

Zealand (\$195), which performed well overall, apart from missing some of our country locations and points of interest (POIs). The GPSMAP 620 is waterproof up to an IPX7 rating (one metre for up to 30 minutes). Although it is significantly larger than the other models on test, it did not overly obstruct the view of the road as it is dash-mounted rather than mounted onto the windscreen. The car mount is an optional extra (\$100), with the marine mount included in the box. >

ABOUT THE REST

CAR GPS

The **Garmin** units performed reasonably overall, with the **Garmin nüvi 1350** and **nüvi 1390T** rating among the easiest to use. The **nüvi 1390T** also includes SUNA live traffic out of the box. However, the **nüvi 1260** performed poorly in our country test.

The **Mio** models performed very well in the city, outscoring some of our overall top performers. However, the **A350**, **A430** and **A470** all had disappointing country driving scores.

The **Navman** units have a similar problem once leaving the city limits, although the **MY500XT** performed well when finding points of interest (POI), and is also the only unit on test using a capacitive touchscreen, where you use your finger instead of a stylus. The **My500XT** and **MY55T** are also two of only three models on test to include SUNA support in the purchase price.

The **Binatone G350** is the least expensive dedicated unit on test, but scored poorly in the country and had the worst city score.

The **Navig8r G35** performed very poorly in the country driving test, and was also the most difficult to use.

IPHONE GPS APPLICATIONS

The **Sygyic for iPhone** application uses Whereis map data, while the **Navigon for iPhone** uses Navteq maps. Both options deliver mid-range performance and are easy to use.

NUTSHELL

>> On test: 24 car GPS devices, including 10 new dedicated models and three applications for the iPhone.

>> The latest GPS applications for mobile phones offer many features previously only available on dedicated car GPS units.

Car GPS devices continue to offer more features at a lower cost, with more than half the units on test under \$300. CHOICE trialled 24 car GPS devices, including three for use on an Apple iPhone, to find the best options for guiding you around the city and country.

Mobile GPS applications

Several iPhone car GPS applications have been released in the past 12 months, and although the three on test deliver only mid-range performance, users should see improvements with regular future updates. All iPhone application tests are carried out using the TomTom iPhone cradle, which has a GPS chip built into the unit, enhancing the performance of the GPS device inside the iPhone.

Nokia also now offers its Navteq maps as a free download for certain handsets, effectively turning a Nokia mobile (with a GPS processor) into a car GPS device without the need for phone network access. All the features you would expect, such as text-to-speech (TTS), lane guidance, automatic rerouting and speed limit warnings, are available. The Nokia maps are also freely available for more than 70 countries, which is a particularly helpful feature if you travel overseas and want to take your mobile phone with you.

However, our testing found dedicated car GPS units still outperform the iPhone-based GPS applications, so it might be a little premature to sound the death knell for the dedicated car GPS just yet.

Hitting the water – or the outback

One of the units just outside our What to Buy list (see opposite) is the **Garmin GPSMAP 620**. Its focus on marine GPS makes it a good option for the boating enthusiast. Aside from being a fully featured marine chart-plotter, it also supports topographic terrain maps for travelling in the bush. By simply changing the mode in the menu, the unit can perform either as a car navigation device or a marine unit.

The test unit was supplied with optional City Navigator NT road maps for Australia and New

WHAT TO BUY

CAR GPS

84% TomTom GO 950

PRICE \$649

GOOD POINTS

- Preloaded maps of Australia, New Zealand, Europe, US and Canada.
- Equal-best POI score.
- Excellent ease of use.
- Excellent screen during daylight.
- Excellent indication of roads and route with good size text and voice recognition.

BAD POINTS

- Slight shaking on rough roads.



BEST BUY

81% Go Cruise (Aldi) GPS-4300

PRICE \$159

GOOD POINTS

- One of the cheapest models on test.
- Excellent instructions.
- Equal-best range of POI.
- Announces school zones.

BAD POINTS

- The unit that CHOICE bought only had Aldi stores (nationwide) listed in the POI menu, but a mini-SD card was supplied on request that included an extended POI list.
- Availability of the model in Aldi stores not guaranteed.

**83%** TomTom GO 750

PRICE \$449

GOOD POINTS

- Equal-best range of POI.
- Excellent screen during daylight.
- Excellent ease of use.
- Excellent indication of roads and route with good size text.
- Voice recognition.

BAD POINTS

- Slight shaking on rough roads.

**80%** TomTom ONE 140

PRICE \$249

GOOD POINTS

- One of the cheaper models on test.
- Very clear indication of roads and route with good-size text.
- Roundabout exits are numbered first, second, etc.
- Printed manual included.

BAD POINTS

- Mount is not as adjustable as the more common ball-jointed type.

**82%** TomTom XXL 540

PRICE \$349

GOOD POINTS

- Equal-best range of POI.
- Excellent screen during daylight.
- Excellent indication of roads and route with good size text.
- Big screen.

BAD POINTS

- Slow to recover after a missed turn.

**79%** TomTom XL 340

PRICE \$299

GOOD POINTS

- Very clear indication of roads and route with good-size text.
- Roundabout exits are numbered first, second, etc.
- Widescreen.
- Printed manual included.

BAD POINTS

- Mount is not as adjustable as the more common ball-jointed type.



IPHONE GPS APPLICATION

79% Uniden Trax 5000

PRICE \$350

GOOD POINTS

- Preloaded maps of Australia and New Zealand.
- Excellent instructions.

BAD POINTS

- Screen doesn't change colour automatically between day and night.

**76%** TomTom app for Apple iPhone/iPod Touch

PRICE \$99

GOOD POINTS

- Very good value for money if you already have an iPhone 3GS.
- Equal-best range of POI.

BAD POINTS

- Very slow to recover when coming out of a tunnel, even when used with TomTom cradle.



- Owners of the original (first generation) iPhone and all iPod Touch users need the TomTom cradle with inbuilt GPS receiver (\$130/Touch or \$160/iPhone) to operate.

HOW WE TEST

City Besides a home address, our tester, Peter Horvath, selects six destinations within Sydney – a railway station, airport, university, medical centre, golf course and sports complex – and starting from the same point, drives the route with all GPS models.

Country He selects wineries and hotels from the most recent Hunter Valley Tourist Guide to find out if the GPS provides accurate directions. Only locations with a proper street address shown in the guide are selected – that is, house or lot number, street name and town name.

Ease of use Peter assesses how useful the instructions are and how easy it is to attach and remove the GPS from the windscreen or dash. He looks at the menu structure on the touchscreen and whether it is necessary to use a stylus to make entries.

Verbal instructions include assessing the quality of the voice on the device, timing of turns and the specificity of instructions, and whether the tester can rely on verbal instructions alone without looking at the screen.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE							FEATURES										SPECIFICATIONS				
Brand / model (in rank order within groups)	Overall score (%)	City driving test score (%)	Country driving test score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Verbal instructions score (%)	Screen quality score (%)	Points of interest score (%)	Routing options: No tolls / No unsealed roads / No highways	Announces school zones	Full-route display	Lane guidance	Walking mode	Text-to-speech (TTS)	More than one TTS	Remote trip planning	Wide screen	Bluetooth	Trip log	SUNA support	Mac support OSX	Map provider	Product assistance (website)
CAR GPS																						
# TomTom GO 950	84	86	67	91	80	97	100	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Whereis	0
# TomTom GO 750	83	83	67	91	80	97	100	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Whereis	0
# TomTom XXL 540	82	81	67	90	80	97	100	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Whereis	0
# Go Cruise (Aldi) GPS-4300 (A)	81	90	67	83	88	63	100	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Whereis	1
TomTom ONE 140	80	81	58	88	90	87	96	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	Whereis	0
TomTom XL 340	79	76	58	91	90	87	96	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Whereis	0
# Uniden Trax 5000	79	90	67	82	83	63	90	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			Whereis	0
# Garmin GPSMAP 620	77	82	50	88	90	97	78	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		M		✓	Whereis (C)	0
Garmin nüvi 1350	77	75	50	95	90	97	78	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(\$129)	✓
# TomTom Start	77	80	67	77	80	70	100	✓ / - / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Whereis	1
Garmin nüvi 1250	74	79	58	93	90	90	37	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(\$129)	✓
Garmin nüvi 1390T	74	76	58	96	90	90	37	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		(B)	✓	Whereis
# Mio Moov A470	71	79	33	84	88	83	90	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(\$129)	Navteq
# Garmin nüvi 1260	70	78	33	86	85	90	72	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(\$129)	✓
Mio A350	66	88	17	86	83	70	72	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				Navteq
Mio A430	66	84	17	89	88	70	72	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(\$99)	Navteq
Navman MY500XT	66	74	25	74	90	77	86	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(B)	Navteq	0
Navman MY30	64	78	25	71	85	77	73	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(\$99)	Navteq
Navman MY55T	63	73	25	72	85	80	73	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(B)	Navteq	0
# Binatone G350	60	68	25	71	80	53	87	✓ / - / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			Navteq	0
Navig8r G35	52	70	17	57	80	50	45	✓ / - / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	PSMA	0
iPHONE GPS APPLICATION																						
# TomTom Car Kit for iPhone	76	79	67	83	73	63	100	✓ / ✓ / ✓ / ✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Whereis	1
# Sygic for iPhone	74	83	50	81	85	67	90	✓ / - / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Whereis	0
# Navigon for iPhone	67	84	33	79	75	67	81	✓ / - / - / -	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	Navteq	0

USING THE TABLE SCORES The overall score comprises: In-car performance: 50% (city 25% / country 25%); Ease of use: 15%; Verbal instructions: 15%; Screen quality: 10%; Points of interest: 10%. For more, see We Test, above. **Features** See What to Look For, opposite. **Price** Recommended retail, as of March 2010. **TABLE NOTES** # Newly tested. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not supplied. **(A)** Availability not guaranteed by Aldi.

Screen quality Peter compares how easy it is to read the map, and how clear the picture is in daylight and at night.

Points of interest (POI) He selects 20 points of interest, including a hospital, medical centre, airport, police station, shopping centre and tourist attraction, and rates the models based on how many POIs are found all over Australia and the accuracy of the information.

Durability He checks the GPS devices after three hours in an oven at 60°C to simulate being in a car on a hot summer's day.

Map update cost (\$)	NZ map support	Other countries available	Memory card type	Screen dimensions (mm, W x H)	Weight (g)	Contact	Price (\$)
140	Included	✓	MicroSD	96 x 55	203	tomtom.com	649
140	✓	✓	MicroSD	96 x 55	206	tomtom.com	449
140	✓	✓		112 x 64	203	tomtom.com	349
140	Included		MicroSD	95 x 54	134	aldi.com.au	159
140	✓	✓		71 x 53	186	tomtom.com	249
140	✓	✓		97 x 57	219	tomtom.com	299
179	Included	✓	SD	110 x 63	225	uniden.com.au	350
195	Included	✓	SD	115 x 70	501	garmin.com.au	1200
99	✓	✓	MicroSD	97 x 56	162	garmin.com.au	249
140	✓	✓		70 x 53	123	tomtom.com	199
99	✓	✓	MicroSD	71 x 53	132	garmin.com.au	199
99	✓	✓	MicroSD	97 x 56	162	garmin.com.au	329
149	✓	✓	MicroSD	105 x 60	170	mio.com.au	259
99	✓	✓	MicroSD	70 x 53	132	garmin.com.au	249
149	✓	✓		71 x 53	116	mio.com.au	149
149	✓	✓		97 x 56	144	mio.com.au	209
149	✓	✓	MicroSD	104 x 59	188	navman.com.au	499
149	✓	✓	MicroSD	71 x 53	123	navman.com.au	249
149	✓	✓	MicroSD	106 x 60	163	navman.com.au	399
100	Included		MicroSD	70 x 52	126	binatone.com.au	148
59	✓		SD	71 x 53	141	navig8r.com.au	159
99	✓	✓		75 x 50	135	tomtom.com	99
80	Included	✓		75 x 50	135	sygic.com	80
80		✓		75 x 50	135	navigon.com/iphone	79

SUNA included in price for unit. (C) City navigator maps available as an optional extra (\$195).
Marine mode.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Routing options This means you can program the GPS to exclude toll roads, unsealed roads or highways from the route.

Announces school zones Provides warnings when approaching a school zone where speed limits are reduced. Some models announce when you're approaching a school, while others simply provide a speed alert.

Full-route display Most car GPS devices project this as a line on the map from your existing position through to your destination.

Lane guidance informs you when to move to the exit lane and displays complex multi-lane manoeuvres clearly.

Walking mode allows you to plot a route for pedestrians, such as going the opposite

way down a one-way street or taking a short cut through a park.

Text-to-speech (TTS) The GPS device announces the street name so you know when to turn without having to glance at the screen. Some models provide more than one voice option, which can be useful if you don't like the default voice.

Remote trip planning allows you to run through your driving route in virtual mode before you even get into the car (also known as A-B routing).

Bluetooth Some units can communicate with Bluetooth-enabled mobile phones, allowing you to make hands-free phone calls and call directly by selecting certain POIs.

Trip log takes notes of your travels and saves the information to post online in an application such as Google Earth.

SUNA allows you to collect live traffic information out of the box with a SUNA subscription integrated into the car GPS unit, or as an optional extra. The trend is to offer this feature only as an option and not include it in the price of the original unit.

Mac compatibility If you want to use your car GPS on a computer, all models on test provide some functionality on a Windows (XP or Vista) machine. However, the Navman, Mio and Binatone models do not offer support for Apple Mac OSX.

Claimed battery life provides a comparative indication as to whether you can use the unit without plugging it in for short trips or take it with you when you require guidance while walking.

Ready to navigate is the time measured from the moment our tester turns on the unit until enough satellites have been located to provide a position. This time frame is a comparative measure only, and may differ depending on the user location and satellite positions.

Memory cards may contain the latest maps, and can also store images, music and video files.

New Zealand map support Most models allow you to add maps for travelling in NZ. However, some include these maps with the original purchase, which can save you up to \$140.





STORY DENIS GALLAGHER

Keep it simple

Sometimes all you need is a mobile that makes and takes calls, while being easy to use and affordable.

NUTSHELL

>> All the phones on test offer safety features to provide valuable help when you need it.
>> However, all models, except the Oricom, have to be ordered online from overseas.

Australians have taken to mobile phones, with the 22 million-plus devices in use outnumbering the population. It's easy to see the appeal – packed with all the bells and whistles, the latest models are highly sophisticated pieces of technology. But comments on the CHOICE website show some users just want a phone that can make and take calls.

An affordable, easy-to-use phone is useful for parents to give their children to stay in contact, while many seniors want a phone with a menu system and button setup that is clear and uncluttered.

CHOICE tested five phones without the features that could complicate the process of making and taking phone calls. They have been designed to help users with hearing or sight impairment, or those wanting to send quick calls or alerts when in trouble. All the phones on test have an illuminated keypad, and include the ability to call or SMS a series of numbers in an emergency and simple access keys for numbers used most often.

While all these phones will work fine on a standard GSM network, none will take advantage of the speeds to be gained through 3G or Telstra's fast Next G network. However, as the phones don't have a camera, can't capture video and can't download anything, high-speed data transfer is not an issue. All the phones support the two Australian GSM bands (900 and 1800MHz). However, if you plan on travelling and using one of these phones, only the Doro models are Triband and support the 1900MHz network frequency commonly used in North America.

Aside from the Oricom Ezy100, the phones tested are only available online. However, they are unlocked and ready to use, so all you need is a working SIM card.

While we can't guarantee these phones will work with any SIM from any network, we did test all phones with SIM cards from Vodafone, 3, Telstra, Virgin and Optus and they all worked fine, except for the Fitage BigEasy 2, which had problems working with the 3 SIM card. >

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE	FEATURES
	Overall score	
	Normal daily use score (%)	
	SMS score (%)	
	Sensitivity score (%)	
	Menu score (%)	
	Durability score (%)	
	Sound quality receiving score (%)	
	Sound quality sending score (%)	
	Manual score (%)	
	Poor sight score (%)	
	Poor hearing score (%)	
	Restricted movement score (%)	
	Emergency button score (%)	
	Battery score (%)	
	Standby time (hours)	
	Display on time (hours)	
	Charging time (minutes)	
	Charging socket	
	Desktop charging cradle	
Doro PhoneEasy 410gsm	80	Proprietary ✓
Emporia LIFEplus	71	Proprietary ✓
Oricom EZY100	66	Mini USB ✓
Doro PhoneEasy 338gsm	61	Proprietary ✓
Fitage BigEasy 2	58	Proprietary

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is based on a combination of: Normal daily use: 20%; SMS: 10%; Sensitivity: 10%; Menu: 10%; Durability: 10%; Sound quality (receiving): 5%; Sound quality (sending): 5%; Manual: 5%; Poor sight: 5%; Poor hearing: 5%; Emergency button: 5%; Battery life: 5%. **(A)** Receives SMS but can't send. None has a camera, support for removable memory, PC connection, GPS or infrared. Only the Doro PhoneEasy 410gsm has a radio and colour display. **Desktop charging cradle** This negates the need to insert a cable and physically plug in the phone for charging. **Bluetooth** indicates the number of buttons on the phone that can be programmed to call user-generated phone numbers. **Maximum ringtone volume** at 0.5 metres (dB) and **maximum speakerphone volume** at 0.5 metres (dB).

WHAT TO BUY



80% Doro PhoneEasy
410gsm (Clamshell)

PRICE \$236

GOOD POINTS

- Suitable for users with restricted movement.
- Excellent menu and durability score.
- Easiest to use according to most of the test panel.
- Bluetooth compatible.
- Only model on test with a colour screen or FM radio.
- Can receive MMS (such as photos).
- Good option for the hearing-impaired.

BAD POINTS

- No dedicated speed-dial button.



71% Emporia LifePlus
(Slider)

PRICE \$260

GOOD POINTS

- Best phone for SMS use.
- Rated as favourite mobile by some of our panel.
- Suitable for users with restricted sight.
- Very good emergency calling function.
- Has a torch.
- Largest display on test.

BAD POINTS

- Some extraneous noise when receiving calls.
- Lowest resolution display.
- Menu not intuitive for some of the panel.
- No dedicated speed-dial button.



66% Oricom EZY100
(Bar)

PRICE \$199

GOOD POINTS

- Suitable for users with restricted movement.
- Charging cradle included and charges via USB connection.
- Bluetooth compatible.
- Simple and effective quick-dial buttons.
- Only phone on test with an Australian distributor.

BAD POINTS

- Least effective among recommended models for the sight-impaired.
- USB connection for charging only, no computer recognition.
- No speed dial using numbers on keypad.

SPECIFICATIONS

Radio	Calculator	Organiser	Receive MMS	Emergency SMS	Emergency phone call	Dedicated speed dial buttons	Speed dial entries	Colour display	Menu font adjustable	Headphone socket (2.5mm)	Hearing aid support	Polyphonic ringtones	Max ringtone volume at 0.5m (dB)	Max speakerphone volume at 0.5m (dB)	SAR certification (W/kg)	Screen dimensions (mm, W x H)	Dimensions (mm, L x W x H)	Weight (g)	Contact	Price (\$)
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		9	✓		✓	M3/T4	✓	87	81	0.69	31 x 40	100 x 52 x 22	100	doro.com	236
	✓			✓	✓		10		✓		T3/M3	✓	86	87	0.53	43 x 47	117 x 59 x 20	158	emporia.at	260
		✓				3	3		✓	✓	T3/M3	✓	89	91	0.53	30 x 26	129 x 51 x 18	101	oricom.com.au	199
				✓	✓	3	3		✓	✓	T3/M3	✓	88	86	0.52	35 x 21	125 x 53 x 17	97	doro.com	175
				✓		3	11	✓	✓	✓	T3/M3	✓	91	82	0.62	41 x 24	180 x 68 x 23	210	rnib.org.uk	340

the ability for the hearing-impaired to effectively use the phone when held to the ear as well as when the phone is in hands-free mode. **Specific absorption rate (SAR)** indicates the amount of energy per gram of body weight absorbed when using the phone as claimed by the manufacturer. All are well below government limits. Although evidence relating to exposure to electromagnetic fields remains elusive, you may want to choose a model with a lower SAR value if this is a concern to you. **Price** All the phones were bought from the UK Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) (www.rnib.org.uk) and sent to Australia in order to confirm local phone network support. The prices in the table represent purchase price paid in March 2010 plus delivery charge, using the exchange rate that was live at the time.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR



Large, clear buttons make it much easier for users with less than perfect sight to turn the phone on/off, change the volume or lock it to prevent accidental selections.



Charging socket All phones are charged via a power outlet using a proprietary connection, except the Oricom which can also **charge via a USB connection** on a PC. However, the PC does not recognise the phone to change settings or synchronise contacts.

Headphone connection type A phone with a standard headphone jack allows you to use headphones to listen to music. All except the Emporia phone can use a headset with a standard 2.5mm jack.

The **Emergency SMS** function can send a predetermined message for help. The **Emergency Call** key allows you to call a predetermined number or numbers should you need help. To use the Emergency Call key, you must first activate the function and store the emergency numbers you wish to call. Some of the units make it very easy to activate and difficult to turn off, which is a plus if you have limited movement and/or limited time to call for help, but a potential problem if you have mischievous children. All mobiles on test with this function are able to have this feature turned off.

Receive MMS allows you to view photos and/or sound sent to your phone. Only the Doro PhoneEasy 410gsm has this feature.

Hearing-aid support The Microphone (M) rating and T-coil (T) rating determine how well your hearing aid will work with your mobile phone. All the units on test have a minimum rating of M3 and T3 (the higher the number the more effective), which means they should work effectively with new hearing aids as well as older models. The Doro claims a T-coil rating of 4.

HOW WE TEST

Unlike almost all testing carried out by CHOICE, much of this test involves people with little experience in using the product. As such, these results are not comparable with our standard mobile phone tests, which are carried out using experienced lab personnel.

Among the nine-person user panel, three use a hearing aid and most also require glasses to conduct the test. Three panel members also have movement impairment to some degree.

Feedback by the panel is used to determine the **poor sight**, **poor hearing** and **restricted movement** scores.

For our **normal daily use score**, each subject performs a series of fixed defined operation steps such as creating and

deleting an entry in the phone book and dialling, making and receiving a phone call. They also create and send as well as receive an SMS to determine the **SMS score**. They assess the **Menu** for tasks such as selecting a profile for silent use and adjusting the ring volume as well as look through the manual to judge how easy it is to read and use. Issues such as font size are also considered.

Sound quality measurements are carried out with users assessing the sound quality of a call as a receiver and a caller.

Durability, sensitivity (on all available frequencies) and **battery life** are all measured by our experienced testers in the same way as per our standard mobile phone test.

ABOUT THE REST

The **Doro PhoneEasy 338gsm** did not score well with older users; however, it could be a good option for kids as it scored equal-best for network sensitivity and is the lightest and cheapest mobile on test. However, it can't send SMS and takes more than two hours to fully charge.

The **Fitage BigEasy 2** is a massive phone and might be a good option if you suffer from arthritis as the keys are large and easy to select. However, it is the most expensive phone on test, the only model on test without polyphonic ringtones and the only model that won't fit in your pocket. Our tester also had issues making it work with the 3 network.



NUTSHELL

>> A 94cm TV is a good option for a small living area.
>> Watching video stored on your home network or on the internet is now an option on some TVs.

A large-screen TV may look impressive but might not be ideal for your room. CHOICE tested 10 LCD TVs with 94cm (37-inch) screens that should suit a room of no more than three metres deep while still delivering a home cinema experience.

The top performers deliver a quality picture, whether you're watching free-to-air or pay TV, a DVD or Blu-ray movie – and, given our Best Buy (see page 45) is also one of the cheapest, performance needn't come at an extra cost.

With claims of a brighter, more vivid picture, LED (light-emitting diode) backlighting is attracting a lot of media attention. However, cold cathode fluorescent lamp (CCFL) backlighting used for all the models on test is still the most prevalent form of backlighting for LCD TVs, particularly for models with a screen of 106cm or less.

Programs off the net

Another exciting development is downloaded content, but for these TVs, it's still very much in its infancy. The Digital Living Network Alliance (DLNA) has been formed to help

STORY DENIS GALLAGHER

Not too big, not too small

One of these mid-sized TVs could be the perfect fit for your room.

bridge the gap between content stored on a PC or home network and your regular TV. Companies supporting DLNA include Microsoft and Nokia, as well as home electronics companies Panasonic and Sony. The alliance's goal is to allow TVs and other home entertainment products to deal more effectively with content stored on a home network or streamed from the internet.

Initially, those TVs that support DLNA, such as the Samsung LA37B650T1F, include a network cable (ethernet) connection, where the TV appears on the home network as a device. Future models with wireless capabilities will connect to a wireless or Wi-Fi router and play video, music and images stored on the home network or internet. >

WHAT TO BUY

Panasonic TH-L37S10A	BEST BUY \$1199
Samsung LA37B530P7F	\$1399
Panasonic TH-L37V10A	\$1799
Samsung LA37B650T1F	\$1899

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Built-in digital tuner All TVs on test have HD digital as well as analog tuners.

On-screen menus should be easy to read and understand without using the manual.

Remote controls should be easy to read, with large, well-spaced buttons.

Wall-mountable All TVs on test can be wall-mounted, but none come with mounts, so you have to buy a separate kit.

Input connections Check that those on the TV match the output on devices you want to hook up to it, such as a DVD player/recorder or games console, and that there are enough connections for all the devices you want to attach at the same time.

Refresh rate (Hz) can be a confusing term, as an LCD TV picture is not refreshed so

many times per second in the same way as a traditional CRT TV. While claims of 100Hz and higher may produce a smoother picture, our testing panel has found that, apart from fast-moving action and sport, some LCD TVs with a 50Hz refresh rate can perform just as well or better overall.

USB connection can be used to read photos, video and music from your digital devices.

HDMI (high-definition multimedia interface) is a digital connection for sound and video in one cable; the latest DVD, Blu-ray and HD set-top boxes should have one. Even if you don't have any gadgets with HDMI output now, it might be worth having a couple of HDMI sockets on your TV for future devices. If you want to use your TV

as a computer display, you'll need a DVI input for newer computers or a VGA input (which all models on test have) for older computers.

Network connections can be a handy way to watch movies in your lounge room rather than home office if you have a lot of video content stored on your PC.

Viewing angles are an issue if several people are watching the TV at once. Stand square to the screen and walk sideways until you notice the image quality drop.



HOW WE TEST

Picture quality Our tester, James Thomson, sets up all 10 TVs close together and adjusts the controls to get the best picture quality possible. He keeps the lighting in the room low and the sound muted, and a panel of three experts watches a variety of footage (from Blu-ray and DVD movies as well as a computer game) simultaneously on all the screens. They rate the picture quality out of 10, using the following criteria:

- How well each TV tested produces accurate colour.
- They display a number of test patterns from a high-quality DVD player and assess each TV for its ability to handle up-scaling of standard definition (SD) content while reducing picture noise and retaining picture detail.
- They play movies and other footage to check the screen's ability to produce images without colour banding, jerkiness, blurring, vibration or colours bleeding in high-contrast

or intensely saturated parts of the image. They also check that there are no trails behind fast-moving objects on the screen.

Sound quality James listens to movies and music to check for rattles, hums, hisses or distortion, and judges how well the high and low frequencies reproduce.

Ease of use He uses the remote control, front panel controls and onscreen display to perform a number of common tasks, and looks for logical menus and clear labelling, and buttons and controls that are easily identified and can be used without interfering with other controls.

Energy score James uses a power meter to measure the power consumed by the TV when in use and on standby (the latter is not scored).

HD digital tuner Our testers check each model's tuner for reception performance in areas with a good signal, as well as areas where reception is less than ideal and where reception might be affected

by things such as a plane flying overhead or appliances being switched on and off.

Viewing angle Our viewing panel stands directly in front of the TV and moves to an increasingly acute angle to determine the quality of the picture when sitting anywhere in the room.



Product	Performance										Features	Specifications																	
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Picture quality								Swivel stand	HDMI input accessible when wall-mounted	HDMI inputs	USB ports*	Claimed screen resolution (pixels)	Claimed refresh rate (Hz)	Energy stars as claimed / as tested by CHOICE	Measured energy consumption when in use (W)	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)**											
		Broadcast TV score (%)	DVD viewing score (%)	Blu-ray viewing score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Energy score (%)	Digital tuner score (%)	Viewing angle score (%)																				
		Panasonic TH-L37S10A	70	74	73	80	45	65	83										83	80	✓	✓	3	0	1920 x 1080	50	4 / 4.5	97	62 x 92
		Samsung LA37B530P7F	68	82	70	70	45	64	83										83	40	✓	✓	3	0	1920 x 1080	50	4 / 4.5	99	66 x 92
		Panasonic TH-L37V10A	66	71	65	75	40	65	80										82	80	✓	✓	4	0	1920 x 1080	100	4 / 4	106	65 x 90
		Samsung LA37B650T1F	65	72	72	70	35	69	79										78	50	✓	✓	4	2	1920 x 1080	100	4 / 4	109	67 x 93
		LG 37LH35FD (A)	61	57	55	55	60	59	87										83	80	✓	✓	3	0	1920 x 1080	50	5 / 5	83	66 x 92
		LG 37LH20D (A)	60	57	52	55	55	59	81										84	80	✓	✓	2	0	1366 x 768	50	4 / 4	103	66 x 92
		LG 37SL80YD (A)	60	54	52	40	65	67	80										86	80	✓	✓	4	1	1920 x 1080	200	3.5 / 4	108	62 x 89
		Toshiba Regza 37AV600A	55	50	57	65	25	56	85										88	80			2	0	1366 x 768	50	5 / 5	90	64 x 90
Sanyo LCD37XR9SDA	44	44	36	45	30	51	81	69	40		✓	✓	3	0	1366 x 768	50	4 / 4	103	64 x 90										
Kogan 108037	40	47	32	10	20	45	64	82	80	✓	✓	3	1	1920 x 1080	120	2 / 2	160	68 x 91											

USING THE TABLE SCORES The overall score is made up of: Broadcast TV: 25%; DVD: 20%; Blu-ray: 10%; Sound quality: 15%; Ease of use: 15%; Energy: 5%; Digital tuner: 5%; Viewing angle: 5%. **Picture scores: 55% and lower** indicates a noticeable problem with the picture. Our panel believes the problem will be noticeable even without the benefit of being able to see a number of TVs together. The lower the score, the more apparent the problem. **55%-69%** indicates OK pictures that most people will be happy with. There are no major problems, but we allow a little latitude with colour shifts at black levels. Also, these TVs may not do well with some of the more demanding technical tests involving such things as up-scaling or noise reduction. **70%-79%** indicates good pictures. Very slight picture errors may be forgiven, but blacks are black (not brown) and whites are white. These TVs will usually perform OK in more demanding technical tests. **80%-89%** indicates very good pictures. These are high quality and will often perform well in some of the more demanding technical tests, as well as with the viewing panel. **90% and higher** indicates excellent pictures. **Price** Recommended retail, as of April

WHAT TO BUY

BEST
BUY
70% Panasonic
TH-L37S10A

PRICE \$1199

GOOD POINTS

- SD card reader.
- Remote control can also be used to operate other devices, such as a DVD player.
- Very good Blu-ray viewing score.
- Good DVD viewing score.
- Good broadcast TV viewing score.

BAD POINTS

- Poor on-board controls.


68% Samsung
LA37B530P7F

PRICE \$1399

GOOD POINTS

- Remote control can also be used to operate other devices, such as a DVD player.
- Good Blu-ray viewing score.
- Good DVD viewing score.
- Very good broadcast TV viewing score.

BAD POINTS

- No bass or treble adjustment.
- Poor on-board controls.


66% Panasonic
TH-L37V10A

PRICE \$1799

GOOD POINTS

- SD card reader.
- Headphone socket is accessible from the front.
- Remote control can also be used to operate some other devices, such as a DVD player.
- Good Blu-ray viewing score.
- Good broadcast TV viewing score.

BAD POINTS

- Poor on-board controls.

ABOUT THE REST

The **LG** TVs offer similar viewing performance, apart from a lower score for the **LG37SL80YD** for watching Blu-ray movies. However, it is the only model on test with a 200MHz refresh rate, which may be useful if you like watching action movies or live sporting events. It can also support Bluetooth devices and read video, audio and image files from a USB device. The **LG37LH35FD** and **LGLH20D** have only one component input, which can be an issue if you want to watch HD video and don't have an HDMI equipped DVD/Blu-ray player. The **LGLH20D** has a top resolution of 1366 x 768, which means it can't display 1080p video (the highest quality HD video available).

The **Toshiba** and **Sanyo** models also have a screen resolution of only 1366 x 768, and the sound quality of each is among the worst on test. However, the Toshiba is one of the most energy-efficient models on test.

The **Kogan** is the cheapest TV on test by a wide margin. Unfortunately, it is also the worst performer for watching DVDs and Blu-rays, and the second-worst for watching digital TV. It also has the lowest energy efficiency.


65% Samsung
LA37B650T1F

PRICE \$1899

GOOD POINTS

- Can access photos, music and video stored on a DLNA server (e.g. a PC running a supported DLNA client such as Windows Media Player 11 or later). If also connected to the internet, this TV can use widgets such as a YouTube viewer.
- Two USB ports.
- Remote control can also be used to operate other devices, such as a DVD player.
- Good Blu-ray viewing score.
- Good DVD viewing score.
- Good broadcast TV viewing score.

BAD POINTS

- No bass or treble adjustment.

Price (\$)

sonic.com.au	1199
amsung.com.au	1399
asonic.com.au	1799
amsung.com.au	1899
com.au	1599
com.au	1299
com.au	1799
iba.com.au	1349
yo.com.au	899
an.com.au	749

ENOTES * Does not include USB ports, are for service use only. ** Rounded the next cm, with the base attached (protruding parts included, cord and cabling cables excluded. (A) Discontinued, may be available in some stores.



STORY MARTHA PSIROUKIS

Air force recruits

Heat pump dryers are the most energy-efficient models CHOICE has ever tested – so could they put their electric vented rivals in a spin?

NUTSHELL

>> We've added six newly tested models to our dryers table, including three very energy-efficient heat pump condenser dryers.

>> A gas dryer is more efficient than an electric dryer in terms of total energy used, unless you're using a renewable energy source for your electricity.

>> A clothes line is still the most energy-efficient and environment-friendly way to dry clothes.

We all know the eco- and cost-friendly way of drying your laundry is on a clothes line, but many people opt for the breezy convenience of a clothes dryer. If you do feel compelled to buy a dryer, you may want to think past those conventional electric models we all grew up with to generally greener alternatives such as an electric heat pump type or a gas dryer.

Heat pump clothes dryers are actually not new, but after a long absence they're back on the market due to growing demand for more energy-efficient appliances. They've never been popular due to their high prices, but with energy costs rising they may become more viable.

In New South Wales, for example, if the maximum proposed electricity cost rise of 62% over three years goes ahead, drying about five loads per week over 10 years will cost about \$1800 for a heat pump dryer, compared with about \$3200 for a vented dryer of a similar size. But a heat pump at this high use will still take more than 10 years to offset its much higher purchase price.

Any electric dryer, whether a conventional vented model or a heat pump type, will be greener if it uses 100% green energy from a renewable source.

How heat pump dryers work

Heat pump dryers use a small refrigeration unit, similar to a dehumidifier, to warm the air that dries the clothes. The warm (and now damp) air passes over the cold condenser plate of the fridge unit, where steam is condensed to water. The dried air then passes back through the heating process into the dryer chamber. The air is in a "closed loop" system, which means heat pump dryers don't have to be vented – making them ideal for apartments or where venting isn't possible.

Going gas

CHOICE's Green Buy is the Rinnai Dry-Soft 6 (see What to Buy, right), even though it uses more energy than electric dryers. Our rating system compares the

energy used at the point of connection (the power point or, in this case, the gas outlet). However, if you consider energy use in its totality – that is, gas used for drying compared with the coal burnt to produce electricity – gas dryers use 60% less energy overall.

This is because two-thirds of the energy in the coal never reaches the household due to energy losses through the grid. But an electric dryer that uses electricity from renewable sources may be even better than gas.

Compared with typical electric vented dryers of a similar size, the Rinnai gas dryer will pay for itself in about eight years when used five times per week, but you may need to add the installation costs, which will take longer to offset the purchase price (most people don't have a gas outlet in the laundry and the unit must be ducted to the outside). >

WHAT TO BUY

5KG-7KG – GAS

71% Rinnai Dry-Soft 6

PRICE \$1799

CAPACITY 6kg

GOOD POINTS

- Low CO₂ contribution.
- Sensor and timer drying.
- Fast drying.
- Can be wall-mounted or stacked.

BAD POINTS

- The controls and filter are badly positioned if the dryer is floor-mounted.
- Requires a gas outlet in your laundry.
- No reverse tumble.



WHAT TO BUY

LESS THAN 5KG –
ELECTRIC VENTED**71%** Simpson
39P400MBEST
BUY

PRICE \$429

CAPACITY 4kg

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for ease of use.
- Can be wall-mounted or stacked.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.

5KG-7KG – ELECTRIC HEAT
PUMP CONDENSERS**80%** Bosch EcoLogixx 7
WTW86560AU/06

PRICE \$2899

CAPACITY 6.5kg

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent energy efficiency.
- Cheap to run.
- Relatively quiet.
- Sensor and timer drying.
- Stackable.

BAD POINTS

- Expensive to buy.

**80%** Miele Softronic
Eco-Comfort
T 8627WP

PRICE \$3199

CAPACITY 6kg

GOOD POINTS

- Very energy efficient.
- Excellent ease of use.
- Cheap to run.
- Relatively quiet.

BAD POINTS

- Expensive to buy.



5KG-7KG – ELECTRIC VENTED

73% Ariston
AS600VX

PRICE \$899

CAPACITY 6kg

GOOD POINTS

- Fast drying time.
- Has sensor and timer drying.
- Can be wall-mounted.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.

**73%** Simpson
39S600MBEST
BUY

PRICE \$619

CAPACITY 6kg

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for ease of use.
- Can be wall-mounted or stacked.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.

**72%** Simpson
39S500MBEST
BUY

PRICE \$559

CAPACITY 5kg

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent for ease of use.
- Can be wall-mounted or stacked.

BAD POINTS

- None to mention.



ABOUT THE REST

The **Electrolux EDH97950W** is very energy-efficient but isn't as easy to use as the other heat pump models.

The **Bosch Maxx 7 Sensitive WTV74100AU/08** and **Whirlpool** are very easy to use, but their drying time and energy scores are only OK.

ACCESSIBILITY

An occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre, NSW, assessed the dryers' suitability for people with disabilities. If you suffer back pain or use a wheelchair, the Ariston and Bosch Maxx 7 are most suitable, if raised off the floor. None are ideal for those with

upper limb dysfunction, so try out their operations before buying. For the vision-impaired, the Whirlpool has the best auditory feedback, but both Bosch models have better control and label contrast. The Whirlpool has the simplest controls, so is best for those with cognitive impairment.

Energy efficiency and drying time scores are based on the amount of energy and time used per kilogram of clothing

HOW WE TEST

Energy efficiency Our tester, Mohamed Jawahir, puts a standard wet load of washing into the dryer (size dependent on its capacity). He measures how long it takes to dry and how much energy is used. The energy efficiency and drying time scores are based on the amount of energy and time used per kilogram of clothing.

Drying time If the dryer has a sensor to determine when the clothes are dry and automatically turns off, Mohamed uses it, otherwise he tests using the timer.

Ease of use is assessed according to how easy the controls are to use and how easy the filter is to access and clean.



PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE								FEATURES	
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Drying time score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Cycle time (mins)	Noise (dB)	Energy used per load (kWh)	Controls	Temperature settings / programs	
LESS THAN 5KG – ELECTRIC VENTED DRYERS										
Simpson 39P400M	71	63	67	93	103	54	3.39	Timer	Warm, hot	
Fisher & Paykel DE45F56AW1	68	62	62	93	135	58	3.92	Timer	Regular, synthetics / delicates	
Fisher & Paykel DE35F56AW1	66	61	62	82	106	58	3.11	Timer	Regular, synthetics / delicates	
Fisher & Paykel DE45F56EW1	66	58	60	92	145	58	4.17	Sensor & timer	Airing, low, regular	
5KG-7KG – ELECTRIC VENTED DRYERS										
# Ariston AS600VX	73	66	72	88	128	55	4.79	Sensor & timer	Automatic, easy iron, cool tumble	
Simpson 39S600M	73	66	70	93	139	57	4.75	Timer	Warm, hot	
Simpson 39S500M	72	64	69	93	122	54	4.11	Timer	Warm, hot	
# Bosch Maxx 7 Sensitive WTV74100AU/08	71	66	69	87	169	54	5.57	Sensor & timer	Extra dry, very dry, cupboard dry, iron dry, warm	
Fisher & Paykel DE60F60EW1	67	59	63	93	192	57	5.47	Sensor & timer	Extra dry, delicates, ready to wear, ready to iron, freshen up	
# Whirlpool AWD60A	67	61	61	92	189	52	5.28	Timer	Extra dry, normal, airing	
5KG-7KG – HEAT PUMP CONDENSER DRYERS										
# Bosch EcoLogixx 7 WTW86560AU/06	80	90	68	85	161	51	2.40	Sensor & timer	Extra dry, very dry, cupboard dry, iron dry, warm	
# Miele Softronic EcoComfort T 8627WP	80	86	70	90	142	50	2.58	Sensor & timer	Auto, warm air, cold air, low temperature	
# Electrolux EDH97950W	73	81	66	73	187	56	3.60	Sensor & timer	Extra, strong, cupboard, damp, iron, cooling	
5KG-7KG GAS DRYERS										
Rinnai Dry-Soft 6	71	53	80	88	88	59	6.15	Sensor & timer	General, extra soft, thick, delicate	

USING THE TABLE SCORES The overall score is made up of: Energy efficiency: 40%; Drying time: 40%; Ease of use: 20%. The energy efficiency score takes into account only the energy used at the point of connection in your home; if we also included the production of energy, the gas dryers would improve significantly. We've changed our energy efficiency rating scale for this report to accommodate the very energy-efficient heat pump models, so you cannot compare the scores published in past reports. **Features** See What to Look For, above right.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Controls – autosensing vs timer Some dryers have a manual timer, while others have a sensor that detects when a load has reached a dryness level and automatically switches off. Some have both. It's easier to overdry with timers, so aim for less time and check the clothes periodically to avoid this.

Filters collect fluff quickly and need regular cleaning, so it's helpful if the filter is at the front. While most filters are on or near the door, the Rinnai's are at the rear of the drum and can be hard to reach.

Vents/ducting If you don't have an exhaust fan or can't place your dryer near a window, you may need a venting kit. Some dryers come with one, while for others it's optional

(but the heat pump models, Fisher & Paykel DE35F56AW1, Haier and Whirlpool models cannot be ducted at all). But not all ducting kits suit all situations. Discuss the installation with the sales staff to make sure you get what you need. Some dryers with a front vent cannot be ducted. See table below.

Wall-mountable or stackable Mounting a dryer on the wall or stacking it on a front-loader saves space.

Reverse tumbling The drum reverses the direction of tumbling at intervals to minimise tangling and evenly dry the clothes. The Rinnai doesn't have reverse tumbling, but our testers felt the load was dried more evenly than in electric dryers.

Drying rack This can be mounted inside some models to hold items you don't want to tumble, such as gym shoes or delicates. Some can be attached to the front of the vent.



SPECIFICATIONS										COSTS	
Drying rack	Wall-mountable / stackable	Air exhaust (vent) location	Ducting kit	Filter location	Unit starts on door shut	Capacity (kg)	Dimensions (cm, W x H x D)	Contact		Running costs (\$/10 years)	Price (\$)
	✓ / ✓	Front (rear optional)	Optional	Inside front		4	60 x 80 x 51	simpson.com.au		865	429
Optional	✓ / -	Rear	Optional	Inside front	✓	4.5	57 x 81 x 56	fp.com.au		999	499
	✓ / -	Front	na	Door		3.5	57 x 81 x 44	fp.com.au		794	429
Supplied	✓ / -	Rear	Optional	Inside front		4.5	57 x 81 x 56	fp.com.au		1064	599
	✓ / ns	Rear	Supplied	Inside front		6	60 x 83 x 56	aristonchannel.com		1221	899
	✓ / ✓	Front or rear	Optional	Inside front		6	61 x 80 x 62	simpson.com.au		1212	619
	✓ / ✓	Front (rear optional)	Optional	Inside front		5	60 x 80 x 55	simpson.com.au		1049	559
	- / ✓	Rear or left side	Supplied	Inside front		7	60 x 85 x 60	boschappliances.com.au		1421	1049
	- / ✓	Rear	Supplied	Inside front		6	60 x 85 x 57	fp.com.au		1380	830
Supplied	✓ / -	Front door	na	Door		6	60 x 83 x 56	whirlpool.com.au		1345	599
	- / ✓	Rear	na	Inside front		6.5	60 x 85 x 60	boschappliances.com.au		611	2899
Optional	- / ✓	Rear	na	Door		6	60 x 85 x 58	miele.com.au		657	3199
	ns / ✓	Front	na	Inside front		7	60 x 85 x 58	electrolux.com.au		917	2429
ns	✓ / ✓	Top panel	Supplied	Inside rear		6	65 x 69 x 53	rinnai.com.au		621	1799

Running costs This is based on drying a full load about three times a week (150 times a year) for 10 years. It's calculated based on electricity at 17c/kWh and gas at 88c/MJ (equivalent to 6c/kWh). **Price** Recommended retail, as of February 2010. **TABLE NOTES** # Newly tested models. na Not available. ns Not stated.

Gas dryers are kind to the planet, but electric models that use renewable energy may be even better



STORY DENIS GALLAGHER

A case of the flue

A gas log fire can deliver a romantic fireplace feel to a large room while also being kind to the environment.

NUTSHELL

>> While most councils discourage wood-burning heaters, a gas log fire efficiently warms a home and has the look and feel of a traditional fireplace. >> CHOICE recommends professional installation of these units.

Home owners have embraced open-plan living, but heating such large spaces can be a challenge. Flued-gas heating, where fumes are released or pushed outside, offers an efficient and effective option for a big area. Add a fireplace effect to the equation and you have an environmentally friendly home, while retaining the cosiness of the log fire.

CHOICE tested five gas log flame heaters with a balanced flued system, where an exhaust flue draws combustion air out into the atmosphere. These units are sufficient to heat a large open-plan area, but the homely fireside effect comes at a price, with the cheapest unit on test costing more than \$4000 installed. All these units can be installed into an existing fireplace, with the chimney accommodating the flue; otherwise, you can use a firebox and put the unit anywhere in the room, as long as you can incorporate a flue.

We strongly recommend professional installation for these heaters, as many things can go wrong. When our testers installed the heaters, in every case there were incorrect parts supplied or manuals incorrectly printed – or some heaters were not assembled correctly to the point of being potentially dangerous.

And make sure you're buying the latest model, or ask for a discount if you purchase last winter's model. ■

HOW WE TEST

Quick heating Our testers check how long the heaters (on their maximum heat and fan settings if applicable) take to increase our test room's temperature by 5°C and 10°C from a starting temperature of 8°C. The outside temperature is maintained at 8°C.

Heating distribution They also create a profile that shows how evenly the room is heated.

Safety With these heaters, safety is vital. Testers carry out gas and electrical safety tests and measure surface temperatures, confirm safe carbon dioxide levels, look for any gas leaks, and see if the ignition works OK and that the gas cuts off in 90 seconds if the flame goes out. All the heaters passed these tests.

Ease of use They assess how easy the heaters are to start, the controls are to use, how clearly the controls are marked, how easy the timer is to program, and how easy it is to clean and change the filter.

Standby power Energy on standby is also measured.



PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE						FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS	
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Quick heating score (%)	Heat distribution score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Safety test	Power consumption in use (W)	Power consumption on standby (W)	Electronic ignition	Remote control	Thermostat	Timer on / off (per day)	Child lock	LPG conversion kit available	Heat settings temperature range
Rinnai Aspiration	87	90	91	80	Pass	86	19.7	✓	✓	✓	2 / 2	✓	✓	16-26
Rinnai Symmetry	81	86	78	78	Pass	44	9.5	✓	✓	✓	4 / 4	✓	✓	16-26
Heat & Glo 6000	70	73	74	63	Pass	48	3.6	✓	✓(C)	✓	2 / 2	✓(D)	✓	Change flame height
Cannon Fitzroy (A)	69	76	70	60	Pass	60	0	✓						High, low burner
Regency Panorama P36NG4 (B)	64	57	69	66	Pass	30	0	✓	✓	✓	2 / 2		✓	7-32

USING THE TABLE Score The overall score comprises: Quick heating: 35%; Heating distribution: 35%; Ease of use: 30%. **Features** See What to Look For, opposite. **Maximum heating capacity** The kilowatt rating will generally determine the speed at which your room will be heated; however some models are more efficient at this than others. Other aspects to consider are how effective the heater is at distributing the heat, keeping pockets of cool air within a room to a minimum. **Dimensions** provide information to measure against space available in an existing fireplace recess. **Flue kit cost** Kits are not sold separately with the kit choice determined by the installation requirements. While a vertical flue allows for installation of a heater in a standard fireplace, a horizontal or powered flue allows greater variety.

WHAT TO BUY

87% Rinnai
Aspiration

PRICE \$5499

GOOD POINTS

- Wireless remote control.
- Thermostat.
- Programmable on/off times.
- Child-lock protection.
- Fastest heater to achieve 5°C and 10°C increase.
- Clear labelling on controls.
- Filter-clean warning (the only heater with a filter).

BAD POINTS

- Highest in-use power consumption at 86W.
- Highest standby power consumption at 19.7W.



ABOUT THE REST

If you have a large fireplace recess for a gas log fire, the **Rinnai Symmetry** could be a good fit. It's not as versatile as our top performer, and you can't leave the room with the remote control as it houses the thermostat. But it had the highest overall heat output and quickly heats a room.

The **Heat & Glo** and **Cannon** deliver similar performance when heating up a cold room. If you have a large enough fireplace, consider the **Heat & Glo** as it delivers a high overall heat output. However, some may find the wired remote of limited use. The **Cannon Fitzroy** is the most compact unit and, although it doesn't have the

features of the top-scoring models, it is one of the most power efficient. It also comes with a horizontal (powerflue) kit as standard (see Using the Table, opposite), so you have more flexibility with your installation. The model we tested does not support a remote, however the latest model due in June does, with the remote also including a thermostat, timer function and child lock.

The **Regency** took the longest time to heat our test room by 5°C and 10°C, but it does have a wide range of choice in setting the room temperature. See Table Note (B), below, on additions for a new NG5 version.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Remote controls allow you to control the temperature settings and fan speeds. Only the **Regency** and **Rinnai** heaters include them as standard, while the **Heat & Glo** has a wired remote and a wireless remote as an option.

Thermostats make it easier to set a desired temperature. Both **Rinnai** models, the **Regency** and the **Heat & Glo** come with a thermostat.

Programmable timers will help with energy saving. All but the **Cannon Fitzroy** can be programmed to turn on and off during a 24-hour period.



Child locks were on the **Rinnai** heaters only, while the **Heat & Glo** had it on the remote. We would like to see this feature on more of the products on test in future.

Electronic ignition All heaters had this feature, saving money with no pilot light running at all times. They all ignited satisfactorily.

A **filter-clean warning** feature would be useful, however only the **Rinnai Aspiration** had filters.

An **LPG conversion kit** allows you to operate the heater in areas without natural gas, but operating costs will be higher as a result. All models on test except the **Cannon** have this option.

						COSTS		
	Max heating capacity (kW)	Star rating	Measured dimensions (cm, W x H x D)	Weight (kg)	Flue type	Contact	Flue kit cost (\$)	Price (\$)
control, automatic	7.0	4.0	90 x 68 x 46	54	Powerflue, horizontal (vertical option)	rinnai.com.au	200 (horizontal kit)	5499
table, manual	7.5	4.2	106 x 75 x 52	82	Powerflue, horizontal (vertical option)	rinnai.com.au	350 (horizontal kit)	4999
	7.6	3.0 (E)	104 x 97 x 54	67	Balanced, vertical (horizontal option)	jetmaster.com.au	400 (700 for horizontal option)	4890
	6.5	4.4	89 x 65 x 43	55	Balanced, horizontal only	sampford.com.au	Included in purchase	3648
unit, none on RC	6.1	1.2	91 x 78 x 34	58	Balanced, vertical (horizontal option)	regency-fire.com.au	519 (569 for horizontal option)	3749

calling a heater not directly under a vent. **Price** Recommended retail, as of April 2010, not including installation. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Model on test does not support remote control. New model offers thermostat and programmable timer through use of optional remote (\$270). **(B)** New model available is P36NG5 with additional air deflectors to improve fan airflow. The new unit also has an overheat safety switch. **(C)** Wired remote control. **(D)** Child lock on remote only. **(E)** 3.5 star rating if used with optional wireless remote.



STORY MATTHEW STEEN

Sounds good?

Noise-cancelling headphones can be handy for the jet traveller, but none we tested were perfect.

NUTSHELL

>> On test: 14 noise-cancelling headphones, priced from \$60 to \$700.

>> These headphones are best at cancelling out continuous noise, rather than broken sounds.

Do you get frustrated by the roar of a plane cabin or hum of an air conditioner? Noise-cancelling headphones cleverly produce a signal based on the noise that annoys, and then use this signal to dampen the offending sound. The limitation of this technology is that it only cancels out constant sounds, not intermittent noises such as the rise and fall of voices, train tracks or a baby crying.

Although none of the 14 headphones CHOICE tested can tackle those less predictable situations, you can improve your chances of a quiet moment with the Panasonic RP-HC500 (see What to Buy, opposite), which has the best passive noise reduction score – the noise can be dampened simply by the design of the headphones themselves, regardless of their circuitry.

You can also use these headphones to listen to your favourite music, but beware neither Bose model on test works for listening to music at all unless the noise-cancelling feature is turned on. As a result, these headphones will be useless if you run out of

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Can be used with power off If the batteries go flat, you can still use them without noise cancellation.

Volume control can come in handy and preferably should be on the cable – although if you're listening to music on an MP3 player, you can usually alter the volume directly on the device.

Detachable cable If you just want a quiet environment without music, a detachable cable means no pesky audio cable getting in your way.

Carry case Especially useful when you're travelling, a good hard case protects your headphones and keeps extra attachments in order. A soft pouch can be easier to pack but doesn't provide as much protection.

battery power midway through a long-haul flight, so you'll need to pack a spare rechargeable battery in your cabin luggage. ■

HOW WE TEST

Noise-cancelling performance is assessed using recordings of ambient sound from the cabin of a domestic jet aircraft.

Comfort A panel of triallists wears the headphones with noise cancellation activated for one hour and comments on the overall comfort level.

Ease of use The panel assesses the ease of adjustment and of using any switches and volume control. Our tester, Scott O'Keefe, assesses range of adjustment; the ease of packing them into any supplied case; and ease of cleaning.

Battery For the battery test, a white noise source is set up near the headphones and noise cancellation turned on. Scott measures how long the batteries last. This doesn't form part of the overall score, as the batteries of all models on test lasted longer than a long-haul flight of 16 hours.

Audio quality Our panel also carries out a listening evaluation to determine audio quality with the noise cancelling turned on and off (where possible). All but the Bose models also work as regular headphones, without noise



cancelling. The quality of sound ranges from excellent for the Sennheiser PXC450 and Blackbox to very good for Audio-Technica, JVC, Sony, TDK and both Bose models, while the rest rate OK.

WHAT TO BUY



84% Bose QuietComfort 15

PRICE \$499

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent sound quality.
- Only one of two headphones on test to have no discernible noise from the noise-cancellation feature.
- Excellent for active noise reduction.
- Battery lasted longer than 50 hours in our test.

BAD POINTS

- Does not work at all without the noise-cancelling feature turned on, or with a flat battery.



81% Panasonic RP-HC500

PRICE \$329

GOOD POINTS

- Best passive noise-reduction results.
- Very good for active noise reduction.
- Battery lasted longer than 50 hours in our test.

BAD POINTS

- No battery supplied with unit.
- Sound quality is only OK.

BEST BUY

ABOUT THE REST

The **Bose QuietComfort 3** rates only OK for ease of use, because the material over the speakers is difficult to clean and the charger doesn't fit into the carry case unless you remove the plug pins.

At more than 300g, the **Sennheiser PXC 450** is the heaviest pair on test, which may be an issue on a long-haul flight once you've bundled it in with everything else you're likely to carry on-board.

Although the **Audio-Technica** and **Blackbox** models are good overall, they're only OK for ease of use.

The **AKG, JVC, TDK, Panasonic RP-HC101, Sennheiser PXC250** and **310** and **JBL** models all have low active noise-reduction scores.

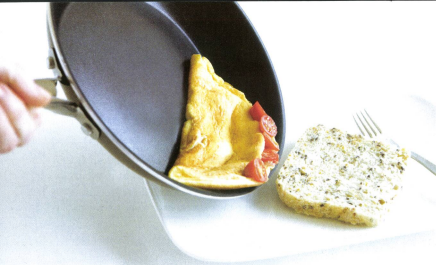
The **Sony** headphones score only borderline for comfort.

The **Panasonic RP-HC101** has a module attached to its cable that makes it awkward to carry around.

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES	SPECIFICATIONS						
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Noise cancelling score (%)	Comfort score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Can be used with power off *	Volume control	Type	Carry case / pouch	Weight (g, including battery and cable)	Cable length (cm)	Contact	Price (\$)
Bose QuietComfort 15	84	92	85	68			Around ear	Case	206	168	bose.com.au	499
Panasonic RP-HC500	81	84	88	68	✓		Around ear	Case	194	152	panasonic.com.au	329
Bose QuietComfort 3	76	78	88	58			On ear	Case	156	299	bose.com.au	599
Sennheiser PXC 450	74	76	70	72	✓	✓	Around ear	Case	319	157	sennheiser.com.au	700
Audio-Technica ATH-ANC7b	73	76	77	65	✓		Around ear	Case	223	104	tag.com.au	349
Blackbox M14	70	74	73	61	✓		Around ear	Case	179	149	blackboxonline.com	375
AKG K 480 NC (A)	60	52	77	58	✓		On ear	Case	161	147	audioproducts.com.au	399
Sony MDR-NC7	60	64	53	61	✓		On ear	Pouch	150	151	sony.com.au	199
JVC HA-NC80	59	39	92	62	✓		On ear	Pouch	164	158	jvc-australia.com	89
TDK NC-150	59	41	74	74	✓	✓	Around ear	Pouch	178	127	tdk-media.com.au	60
Panasonic RP-HC101	58	38	82	76	✓	✓	On ear	Pouch	90	154	panasonic.com.au	169
Sennheiser PXC 250	58	48	71	66	✓		On ear	Pouch	136	190	sennheiser.com.au	350
Sennheiser PXC 310	58	54	61	65	✓	✓	On ear	Pouch	120	139	sennheiser.com.au	500
JBL Reference 510	44	38	37	64	✓		On ear	Pouch	178	207	conexus.com.au	300

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of: Noise cancellation: 50%; Comfort: 25%; Ease of use: 25%. **Noise-cancelling score** How well the headphones cancel out noise and how much noise the noise-cancelling signal introduces to the headphones. **Comfort** consists of how comfortable the headphones are to wear for one hour. **Ease of use** details how easy they are to adjust their switches and volume controls (if any), how easy they are to clean and how functional their carry case is. **Features** See What to Look For, opposite. **Price** Recommended retail, as of February 2010.

TABLE NOTES * All noise-cancelling headphones on test are battery-powered; most allow you to turn the feature off and still listen to music. (A) Discontinued, but may still be available in some stores.



STORY REBECCA GATTO

A sticking point

Take good care of your non-stick frypan to ensure its longevity.

NUTSHELL

>> 14 non-stick frypans on test, ranging from \$23 to \$231 and 26cm-30cm.

>> Spending a little more on a non-stick frypan can save you money in the long run, but even an expensive frypan can be worthless if it's not looked after properly.

Because less oil is used, a non-stick frypan allows for healthier cooking and easier cleaning. However, its effectiveness and longevity ultimately come down to the way it's used.

CHOICE assessed 14 non-stick frypans for their non-stick surface, heat distribution, durability and overall ease of use. When it comes to durability, our vigorous scratch test divided the frypans in half – see table, below. Generally, frypans in the top half of the table performed very well for durability; while the coating had a polished effect, it wasn't scratched to the extent that bare metal was exposed. By contrast, most frypans in the bottom half are poor or very poor for durability. The Raco Sensory Expressions frypan is the best performer for ease of use.

In most cases, a higher price tag is an indicator of performance. However, the Circulon and Raco are reasonably priced frypans that made our recommended

list (below). By contrast, the Cuisinart, priced at \$119, came in at the bottom of our table. Non-stick cookware cannot be used in the same way as stainless steel pans (see Using Your Non-Stick Frypan, opposite).

Safety concerns

Many reports have focused on the safety of non-stick coatings, suggesting some, such as Teflon, give off harmful chemicals when heated. The chemical in question is polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE), which

WHAT TO BUY

Circulon Steel Elite 28cm	BEST BUY	\$80
Swiss Diamond 6428 28cm		\$231
Raco Sensory Expressions 26cm	BEST BUY	\$90
Scanpan Classic 26cm		\$219

PRODUCT	PERFORMANCE				FEATURES				SPECIFICATION
Brand / model (in rank order)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Durability score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Claims to be free of PTFE and/or PFOA*	Suitable for induction cooktops	Dishwasher-safe	Over-safe	Flatness of base
Circulon Steel Elite 28cm	85	93	90	63		✓	✓ (D)	✓ (up to 200°C)	Concaved
Swiss Diamond 6428 28cm	81	82	90	70			✓	✓ (up to 260°C)	Slightly concave
Raco Sensory Expressions 26cm	80	83	80	73				✓ (up to 180°C)	Concaved
Scanpan Classic 26cm	80	83	90	63	✓		✓ (D)	✓ (up to 260°C)	Slightly concave
Jamie Oliver by Tefal Hard Anodised Range 26cm	75	88	70	53	✓		✓	✓ (up to 260°C)	Concaved
Chef Inox Professional 28cm	74	76	90	53		✓	✓	✓ (up to 230°C)	Concaved
Anolon Advanced 28cm	73	70	90	60				✓ (up to 200°C)	Flat
Baccarat BC Atlas ID3 HA Frypan 26cm	70	68	90	53		✓	✓	✓	Slightly concave
GreenPan Kyoto 28cm	67	83	30	70	✓			✓ (up to 180°C)	Concaved
Wiltshire Thermopoint W3268 (A)	67	88	20	70				ns	Flat
Tefal Preference 26cm	66	84	30	67	✓	✓	✓	✓ (up to 170°C)	Slightly concave
Homemaker Essentials 30cm (B)	66	68	60	67			✓	ns	Concaved
Ballarini Trevi 28cm (C)	62	81	20	67			✓	ns	Concaved
Cuisinart Chef's Professional 28cm	54	67	20	60	✓		✓	✓ (up to 220°C)	Concaved

USING THE TABLE SCORES The overall score is made up of: Performance: 50%; Durability: 25%; Ease of use: 25%. **Features** See What to Look For, opposite. **Price** Recommended retail, as of March 2010.

TABLE NOTES * See Safety Concerns, above. Firenze. (A) To be discontinued in June and replaced by a new model. (B) Discontinued, but still available in 20cm, 26cm and 32cm. (C) Discontinued, new range is ca

is used to achieve the non-stick surface. Research suggests that above 260°C, PTFE starts to break down and release harmful toxins. You're likely to reach such high temperatures if you use maximum heat and preheat your pan. The effect of these toxins on birds seems to be lethal; while the risks to humans are less well known, it may cause headaches, nausea and damage to the respiratory tract. Keep in mind, however, that if you use your pan properly, it's unlikely to cause harm.

Perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA), a synthetic chemical, is used as a processing aid in the manufacture of PTFE coatings. The US Environment Protection Agency has undertaken research into the risk of PFOA on humans and the environment, and has established a 2010/15 PFOA Stewardship Program, whereby some major industry companies have voluntarily agreed to work towards eliminating emissions and use of PFOA and related chemicals by 2015.

In this test, Scanpan, GreenPan, Tefal, Jamie Oliver by Tefal and Cuisinart claim to be free of PTFE and/or PFOA. GreenPan also claims its manufacturing process results in 60% less carbon dioxide emissions than during the production of PTFE pans. >

heated	Weight (kg)	Contact	Price (\$)
ly concaved	1.5	cookwarebrands.com.au	80
	1.2	swissdiamond.com	231
ly concaved	0.9	cookwarebrands.com.au	90
	1.0	scanpan.dk	219
ly concaved	1.3	tefal.com.au	190
aved	1.6	tomkin.com.au	160
ly concaved	1.6	cookwarebrands.com.au	100
aved	1.0	ns	108
ly concaved	1.1	green-pan.com	100
	0.7	mcpher.com.au	35
aved	1.0	tefal.com.au	70
	1.1	kmart.com.au	23
aved	0.9	mcpher.com.au	80
ly concaved	1.5	cuisinart.com.au	119

ni Firenze. (D) Dishwasher-safe, but not recommended.
(†) stated.

USING YOUR NON-STICK FRYPAN

Read the manufacturer's instructions

They recommend washing the pan in warm, soapy water to remove any residues. Condition the frypan before use by wiping oil onto the non-stick surface and rubbing away any excess.

Don't use cooking oil sprays These burn at low temperatures and leave an invisible build-up of residue that could affect the performance of the non-stick surface.

Never heat fat or oil at maximum temperature If your pan uses PTFE, you run the risk of harmful toxins being released. Also, your pan is likely to bubble and blister, rendering it useless.

Don't overheat an empty non-stick pan or leave it unattended on the cooktop Non-

stick cookware should only be used at low to medium temperatures and never on high heat, unless you're bringing liquid to the boil.

Use only wooden or plastic utensils to avoid scratching the surface.

Use a soft sponge rather than a harsh scourer If you have stubborn residue left on your frypan, it may be easier to clean off when the pan is still slightly warm. Also, soaking it in hot water can make it easier to wipe the residue away.

Avoid cleaning your frypan in the dishwasher, as some detergents can be too harsh for the non-stick surface. If you do, you should recondition the surface.

Never rinse a hot frypan in cold water It damages the coating and warps the base.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Flat, steady base If you have a solid/radiant electric cooktop. Generally, a pan that's slightly concave to begin with will flatten on heating. If your pan concaves on heating, you may find the food runs to the sides of the pan.

Suitable for induction cooktop If you have an induction cooktop you'll need a frypan that's made of ferrous metal (meaning it can be magnetised) and fits perfectly on one of the elements.

Thick, heavy base will

generally give better heat distribution.

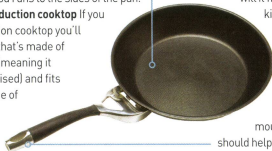
Easy cleaning Avoid a painted exterior and grooved surfaces, and take into consideration the frypan's size and shape – for example, will it fit easily into your

kitchen sink?

Weight Will you be able to handle the load when it's filled with food?

Handle Look for one with a soft, moulded grip; this

should help support the load.



ACCESSIBILITY

CHOICE assessed these frypans for their suitability for people with a disability, using guidelines from the Independent Living Centre, NSW. The **Raco** is suitable; it has a comfortable handle, and despite its painted exterior it's easy to clean in the sink (and it's also one of our Best Buys). However, keep in mind that most frypans are moderately heavy. If you have a disability, look for:

• A pan with two handles (if possible) The Chef Inox is the only frypan on test to have

a support handle, but it is still very heavy and unbalanced. Also keep in mind that you'll need to wear an oven mitt, as the support handle gets hot.

• A handle long enough to hold with two hands, that's comfortable, contoured and reasonably thick.

• Handles should be made of a material that doesn't get too hot.

• The pan should be lightweight and easy to clean.

WHAT TO BUY

BEST
BUY



85% Circulon Steel Elite 28cm

PRICE \$80

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent durability of the non-stick surface.
- Excellent results for single fried egg test (see How We Test, right).
- Excellent performance.
- Reasonably comfortable handle and grip.
- Easy-to-clean exterior surface.
- Easy to clean in a domestic sink.
- Suitable for all hob types.
- Dishwasher-safe (but not recommended).
- Oven-safe.
- Thick base.

BAD POINTS

- Very heavy and unbalanced.



81% Swiss Diamond 6428 28cm

PRICE \$231

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent heat distribution.
- Excellent durability of the non-stick surface.
- Very good performance.
- Thick base.
- Comfortable handle.
- Easy-to-clean exterior surface.
- Easy to clean in a domestic sink.
- Dishwasher-safe.
- Metal utensils can be used.

BAD POINTS

- Most expensive frypan on test.
- Comparatively heavy.
- Thin grooves on base can be difficult to clean.



80% Raco Sensory Expressions 26cm

PRICE \$90

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent results for single fried egg test.
- Very good for heat distribution.
- Very good performance.
- Very good durability of the non-stick surface.
- Oven-safe.
- Comfortable stainless steel and soft-grip handle.
- Easy to clean in a domestic sink.

BAD POINTS

- Painted exterior can be difficult to clean.

BEST
BUY



80% Scanpan Classic 26cm

PRICE \$219

GOOD POINTS

- Excellent heat distribution.
- Excellent durability of the non-stick surface.
- Very good performance.
- Thick base.
- Claims to be PTFE free.
- Dishwasher-safe (but not recommended).
- Oven-safe.
- Easy-to-clean exterior.
- Easy to clean in a domestic sink.

BAD POINTS

- Comparatively expensive.
- Fairly uncomfortable handle.
- Thin grooves on base can be difficult to clean.

HOW WE TEST

Heat distribution Our tester, Fiona Mair, cooks a pancake in each frypan to assess its evenness of heat distribution.

Non-stick capability First, she fries one egg with no oil to assess the performance of the non-stick surface. She then fries four eggs consecutively, using only a quarter teaspoon of oil to start. For these tests she follows the manufacturer's instructions regarding whether or not the pan needs to be seasoned. These tests are done on an electric ceramic cooktop.

Durability A section of each frypan is scrubbed up to 10,000 times with a scourer under a 10kg weight to assess the resilience of the non-stick coating.

Ease of use Fiona assesses the comfort of the handle, and balance and weight of the frypan when lifting. She also looks at ease of cleaning the non-stick surface.



ABOUT THE REST

The **Jamie Oliver by Tefal** does well for durability but is let down by its ease of use. This is the case for most frypans, given their heavy weight and uncomfortable handles. Of the rest, only the **GreenPan** and **Wiltshire** had good results.

The **GreenPan**, **Tefal**, **Wiltshire** and **Ballarini** frypans performed well but all are let down by their poor or very poor durability scores; the Wiltshire exposed bare metal after just 80 scrubs.

Cuisinart stands out noticeably as the lowest performer. Its heat distribution is only OK, and it took just 50 scrubs before bare metal was exposed in our durability test.

Best product **and** best price – now that's **CHOICE**!

Finding the best product to meet your needs and at the best price can be time-consuming and frustrating. How often have you bought an item, only to discover it's cheaper somewhere else?

In addition to providing CHOICE members with authoritative, independent and expert advice on products, we also help you find the best price – now that's value.



Good news!

CHOICE Shopper does all the shopping and negotiating on your behalf to make sure you're getting the best price while saving you time and frustration.

As a CHOICE member, you receive free access to **CHOICE Shopper** – just another of the special member benefits.

It's an exclusive service for personal CHOICE members, designed to find the best price on a wide range of products valued over \$100 ... and it's quick and easy!

Items include brown goods and whitegoods (TVs, sound systems, fridges, dishwashers, etc), everyday home electrical appliances, cameras, lawnmowers, tyres, computers ... and lots more!

All you need to do is:

- 1 Call **CHOICE Shopper** on **1300 360 655** (Mon-Fri, 9am to 5pm AEST).
- 2 Tell us your membership number, the item's make, model and your best price (over \$100) ... and we'll find you the best deal on the product you're looking for.

CHOICE Shopper will call you back and advise the best price that we've found.

If you're happy with that price, we'll place the order and the supplier will contact you to arrange payment and delivery.

And it's just a phone call away ... **EASY!**

What some CHOICE members have said about CHOICE Shopper

"When purchasing items, I look at CHOICE for information, use their sound judgment, get the best price I can and then CHOICE Shopper beats it."
CHOICE MAGAZINE MEMBER, QLD

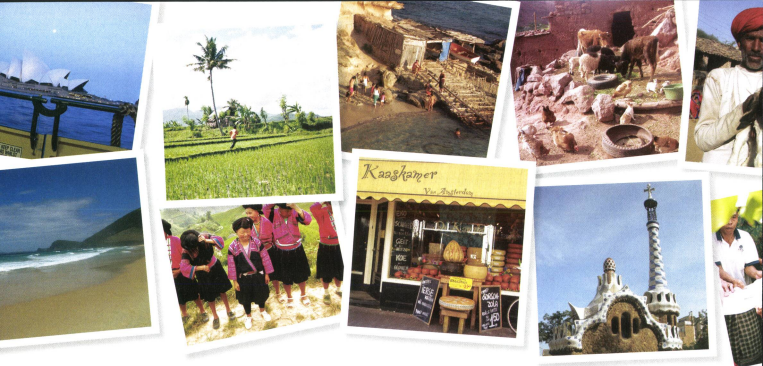
"I research the item in CHOICE and then often use CHOICE Shopper to get the best price ... it has always been cheaper."
CHOICE COMPUTER MEMBER, NSW

"The background information ranking purchases on relevant criteria was helpful in making a choice of product. CHOICE Shopper then found me the best price for that product."
CHOICE ONLINE MEMBER, TAS

Simply call CHOICE Shopper
1300 360 655
when making your next purchase.

choice

Make the right one.



NUTSHELL

>> CHOICE reviews 27 comprehensive travel insurance policies and recommends policies for four destinations.
>> Terms and conditions are confusing, so always clarify anything you don't understand before parting with your money.

STORY CECILIA LEE

Have insurance, will travel

Always read the terms and conditions before you buy travel insurance – otherwise you may be in for a nasty surprise when making a claim.

Whether it's an Icelandic volcano cloud or a stolen camera – unforeseen events can disrupt your holiday no matter how carefully you've planned ahead. Between July 2008 and June 2009, three million travel insurance policies were issued and more than 180,000 claims were made. Nine percent were rejected, which is high relative to motor and home and contents insurance claims (where only 0.6% and 3.5% got the thumbs down, respectively). It's up to travel insurers to decide whether they'll cover flight delays caused by volcano clouds or deem them an "act of God", which is not covered.

Most disputed claims arise from the loss of unsupervised luggage, but pre-existing illnesses are usually the basis of the most complex cases. Understanding the terms and conditions of your travel insurance will help you avoid these pitfalls and ensure a stress-free holiday.

Keep an eye on that luggage

A common exclusion for insuring luggage and belongings is that valuables such as jewellery, mobile phones and cameras are not covered when they're checked in. Luggage and belongings left unsupervised in a public place are also not covered. The Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) reviewed a case concerning a traveller who placed his laptop bag next to him on the floor in a McDonald's restaurant; by the time he'd finished

WATCH OUT FOR UNFAIR TERMS

Nicole Rich from the Consumer Action Law Centre believes some travel insurance policies contain terms that might be considered unfair. The Australian Consumer Law, which protects consumers from unfair contract terms in standard-form contracts, is expected to come into effect by the end of this year; however, insurance policies are excluded. The government has now called for submissions to consider unfair terms in insurance contracts. "Insurance should never have been excluded from the general unfair contract terms law in the first place," says Rich, "so it is overdue that they be covered by unfair terms protections."

his burger, the laptop was gone. The insurer refused the traveller's claim on the basis that he'd left his bag unsupervised in a public place. The Ombudsman upheld the insurer's decision, as the policy's product disclosure statement (PDS) clearly stated "unsupervised means ... leaving your luggage and personal effects in a position where they can be taken without your knowledge".

Graham Warner from the FOS explains that even leaving your belongings on the side of a basketball court while you play can mean they are not covered,

BEFORE YOU TRAVEL – ESSENTIAL CHECKLIST

List valuable items you'll be bringing with you on your trip (such as a camera or laptop) and take photos of them in case you need to claim. Check the terms and conditions for covering these items; for example, a camera is not covered if it's left unattended in a motor vehicle. You may want to increase the cover limit by listing them as specified items.

List some sporting activities or adventures you intend to do and check whether these are excluded. Paragliding, hot-air ballooning and scuba diving are usually covered by insurers, providing you have a licence or the activity is operated

by a commercial company. World Nomads covers glacier walking and mountain biking at no additional cost. Some insurers only cover skiing when you buy the optional cover (additional premium), while others also provide optional cover for your golf or ski equipment.

Buy travel insurance as soon as you can, especially if you have pre-existing medical conditions. If not automatically covered, some insurers will require you to get a medical assessment. For pre-existing conditions, check the limits and procedures for getting cover and make sure you understand the insurer's terms and definitions.

Keep up to date with what's happening at your travel destination. There is generally an exclusion among insurers that a claim is not covered if you do not follow travel advice in the mass media of any government or other official body's warning (visit www.smarttraveller.com.au for more information).

Report any incidents of theft or lost luggage to local police as soon as possible and keep all your receipts and relevant documentation for claiming purposes. This may be time-consuming, especially if you don't speak the official language.

NUMBER CRUNCH

\$800+

Daily hospitalisation costs in South-East Asia.

\$10,000+

The cost to return human remains from Europe.

\$300,000

The maximum potential cost of medical evacuations from the US.

Source: www.smarttraveller.gov.au

because you're unable to prevent them from being taken – which is part of the insurer's definition of "unsupervised". In the common situation where you're directed to leave your bags in the luggage compartment on a train or bus, Warner says you should be covered as long as you don't leave valuables in them.

Pre-existing conditions

Usually, only unexpected medical emergencies that occur while you're overseas are covered – pre-existing medical conditions are not automatically covered.

A pre-existing condition can include:

- A condition for which treatment, medication or advice has been received or prescribed by a doctor or dentist in the 90 days before your trip.
- A condition for which you take prescribed medicine.
- An ongoing medical or dental condition of which you're aware, or a related complication, or symptoms of which you're aware.

Some insurers do cover certain medical conditions at no extra cost. Asthma, diabetes (type 1 and 2), high blood pressure and high cholesterol are covered at no additional cost by all the insurers we surveyed except Columbus Direct, World Nomads and Zuzi; iTrek does not cover asthma or diabetes. Age limits and conditions apply. Below are some examples:

- Asthma is covered, providing you have no other lung disease.
- Diabetes (type 1 and 2) is covered, providing you were diagnosed more than 12 months ago and have no eye, kidney, nerve or vascular complications,

OVERSEAS

Medical care abroad

The federal government has signed Reciprocal Health Care Agreements (RHCA) with the governments of the UK, Ireland, Sweden, Belgium, Finland, Norway, the Netherlands, Malta, Italy and New Zealand, which cover any immediately necessary treatment you may require while in that country. Most of the insurers we surveyed will only cover medical treatment by the public health system in these countries, which means they won't provide full hospital cover as you are already assisted by RHCA.

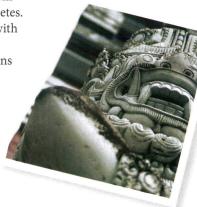
and do not also suffer from a known cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure or high cholesterol.

- High cholesterol and high blood pressure are covered, providing you do not also suffer from a known cardiovascular disease and/or diabetes.
- If you have any medical conditions, check with your insurer whether claims relating to these conditions will be covered. Cover for conditions not listed by insurers usually requires assessment and an additional premium. For example, with an additional premium, and provided medical assessment is satisfactory, Cover-More (see Caring Coverage, page 61) will cover those with anxiety or dementia. >



CHOICE ONLINE

For more information on pre-existing medical conditions and the policies for various destinations and lengths of journey, log onto www.choice.com.au/travelinsurance



If your travel agent or tour operator becomes insolvent, odds are you won't be covered

What's the cancellations policy?

< Most insurers will cover cancellation fees and lost deposits for travel and accommodation arrangements, if you need to cancel or shorten your journey due to unexpected events such as involuntary redundancy, death or sickness of yourself, a travelling companion or close relative. Once again, different insurers have different definitions, so check your policy carefully.

The definition of travelling companion varies, from someone with the same itinerary as you to a person who is travelling with you for at least half the journey. In some cases a relative has to be under 85 and live in either Australia or New Zealand. In most instances, the pre-existing medical conditions of your relative are not covered; this means your cancellation costs will not be covered if they become seriously ill or die from a known ongoing condition such as cancer.

Most insurers do not cover losses due to the insolvency of a travel agent, tour operator or airline. But if you've paid by credit card, you can pursue the right of charge-back with your bank. Should your travel agent become insolvent, you can contact the Travel Compensation Fund on its claims hotline – 1300 658 165.

Other types of travel cover

Providing certain conditions are met, some credit card providers offer complementary travel insurance cover. Cover is usually basic, so obtain a copy of the PDS and check whether anyone else travelling with you is covered (such as your spouse or dependent children). For regular travellers, an annual travel insurance policy may be cheaper than single-trip covers if you are planning multiple trips in a 12-month period, but there is usually a limit on how long each trip can be. ■

RECOMMENDED TRAVEL INSURANCE POLICIES

		SINGLE ADULT POLICY		COUPLE / FAMILY POLICY		POLICY FEATURES				
Company / policy	Underwriter	Features score (%)	Premium (\$)	Features score (%)	Premium (\$)*	Standard excess (\$)**	Age limit for these premiums	Age limit (inclusive) to apply for policy***	Medical (\$, sub-limits may apply, eg dental cover)	Luggage (\$)
5 DAYS IN NEW ZEALAND^										
1Cover Plan A Comprehensive – Pacific	Allianz	76	41	73	82	100	59	na	Unlimited	50
Good2Go Bronze	Chartis	81	46	78	91	0	69	na	Unlimited	15
Southern Cross TravelCare – New Zealand / South Pacific^	Southern Cross Travel Insurance	75	29	75	56	100	54	69	Unlimited	25
Travel Insurance Direct Plan A – South Pacific and Bali	Allianz	74	38	71	76	100	49	80	Unlimited	12
10 DAYS IN THAILAND^										
1Cover Plan A Comprehensive – Asia	Allianz	76	70	73	140	100	59	na	Unlimited	50
Good2Go Silver	Chartis	81	80	78	160	0	69	na	Unlimited	15
Southern Cross TravelCare – World^	Southern Cross Travel Insurance	75	56	75	109	100	54	69	Unlimited	25
Travel Insurance Direct Plan A – United Kingdom & Asia	Allianz	74	70	71	140	100	49	80	Unlimited	12
21 DAYS IN USA^										
1Cover Plan A Comprehensive – Worldwide	Allianz	76	129	73	252	100	59	na	Unlimited	50
Good2Go Platinum	Chartis	81	155	78	310	0	69	na	Unlimited	15
Ouch International – Premium Plus Extras	QBE Insurance	84	128	80	254	100	64	64	Unlimited	15
Southern Cross TravelCare – Superworld^	Southern Cross Travel Insurance	75	108	75	210	100	54	69	Unlimited	25
28 DAYS IN EUROPE (INCLUDING UK)^										
1Cover Plan A Comprehensive – Europe	Allianz	76	133	73	285	100	59	na	Unlimited	50
Cover-More Travelsure – International Restricted Worldwide	Great Lakes Australia	79	141	79	282	100	49	84	Unlimited	60
Good2Go Gold	Chartis	81	144	78	288	0	69	na	Unlimited	15
Southern Cross TravelCare – World^	Southern Cross Travel Insurance	75	88	75	172	100	54	69	Unlimited	25

Cover limits are for individuals and are often higher for families and couples. All premiums are rounded to the nearest dollar and were provided by insurers in January 2010. * Different limits apply to dependents. ** Excess may not apply to all claims and different excesses may not be possible. \$100 excess applies for Good2Go for trips of 35+ days. *** Conditions apply for older travellers. # Higher limits may apply for valuable items, such as cameras or laptops, as defined by insurers. Higher cover for specified items may be available with an additional premium. ## Most insurers will only cover cash stolen "on person". ▲ Policies shown are according to v

DID YOU KNOW?

Agent or online?

Our review in December 2004 showed travel insurance was mainly sold through travel agents; now it's mostly sold on the internet. Southern Cross policies are only offered online.

One insurer told CHOICE that it's much cheaper to buy travel insurance online instead of through a travel agent. Commissions of up to 53% are paid to Qantas by QBE, and commissions up to 30% are paid to B-Secure by Mondial Assistance (a subsidiary of Allianz), which in turn receives up to 36% of the premium as a service fee. So ask a travel agent to match an online quote or give you a discount.

Stolen cash (\$/##)	Cancellation (\$)	Liability (\$ millions)	Minimum hours before carrier-caused delay covered	Rental car excess (\$)
250	Unlimited	5	6	5000
na	Unlimited	2.5	10	4000
1000	50,000	2	12	3000
250	Unlimited	2.5	12	4000
250	Unlimited	5	6	5000
na	Unlimited	2.5	10	4000
1000	50,000	2	12	3000
250	Unlimited	2.5	12	4000
250	Unlimited	5	6	5000
na	Unlimited	2.5	10	4000
200	Unlimited	3	6	5000
1000	50,000	2	12	3000
250	Unlimited	5	6	5000
100	500,000	2.5	6	3000
na	Unlimited	2.5	10	4000
1000	50,000	2	12	3000

na: POS or websites say are suitable for the particular country/region; more expensive as with higher cover (such as those suitable for US trips) can sometimes be for these regions. AA Not a Best Buy in SA due to higher premium. na Not applicable.

CONTACTS

- **1Cover**, www.1cover.com.au, 1300 192 021
- **AAMI**, www.aami.com.au, 13 22 44
- **Aussietravelcover**, www.aussietravelcover.com.au, 1800 888 448
- **B-Secure**, www.b-secure.com.au, 1800 010 457
- **CGU**, www.cgu.com.au, 13 15 32
- **Chartis**, www.chartistravelinsurance.com.au, 1800 017 682
- **Columbus Direct**, www.columbusdirect.com.au, 1300 669 999
- **Cover-More**, www.covermore.com.au, 1300 728 822
- **Good2Go**, www.good2gotravelinsurance.com.au, 1800 017 682
- **Insure4less**, www.insure4less.com.au, 1300 796 810
- **Insure and Go**, www.insureandgo.com.au, 1300 401 177
- **iTrek**, www.itrek.com.au, 1310 884 430
- **Medibank**, www.medibank.com.au, 13 23 31
- **OUCH**, www.ouch.com.au, 1300 880 231
- **Southern Cross**, www.scti.com.au
- **STA**, www.statravel.com.au, 1300 728 822
- **Travel Insurance Direct**, www.travelinsuredirect.com.au, 1300 843 843
- **Travel Insuranz**, www.travelinsuranz.com.au, 1300 799 532
- **Worldcare**, www.worldcare.com.au, 1800 008 614
- **World Nomads**, www.worldnomads.com.au, 1300 787 375
- **Zuji**, www.zuji.com.au, 1800 142 070

CASE STUDY

Caring coverage

In 2005, CHOICE member Elaine from Adelaide took out travel insurance with Cover-More for her mother, who was 73 at the time and travelling with Elaine to the UK for a four-week holiday. Elaine paid an extra premium, but her mother did not require a medical assessment.

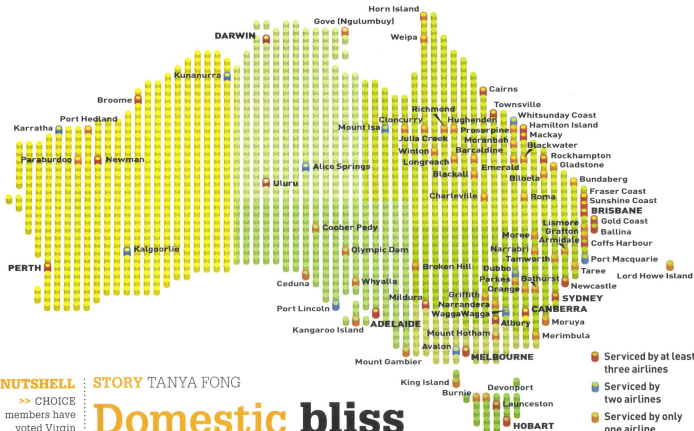
Sadly, Elaine's mother passed away on arrival in London from a heart attack. One phone call to the Cover-More emergency number and everything was taken care of. "I got several phone calls from Cover-More while still in London to keep me up to date with what was happening and to make sure I was OK," says Elaine.



HOW WE SURVEY

Brands We surveyed 21 brands of travel insurance and 27 policies in total, including policies underwritten by Allianz, Chartis (formerly American Home Assurance Company), CGU, Great Lakes Australia, Lloyds and QBE (underwriter for the brand OUCH). QBE is in the process of redeveloping its travel insurance product and so declined to participate.

Features score Policies are scored out of 100, with the following weighting: Medical cover: 40%; Cancellation and other expenses: 25%; Luggage and belongings cover: 20%; Legal liability cover: 10%; Other cover and services: 5%.



NUTSHELL

>> CHOICE members have voted Virgin Blue as the best domestic airline for two years running.

>> To save time waiting at check-in desks and luggage carousels, check in online and take only carry-on luggage.

STORY TANYA FONG

Domestic bliss

Before booking your next interstate trip, read how 11,000 CHOICE members rate domestic airlines for price and quality of service.

CHOICE's latest domestic airlines satisfaction survey shows our members are savvy about distinguishing between carriers. Most choose to fly Qantas, the only commercial full-service airline among our domestic carriers; overwhelmingly, they do so because of its frequent flyer program.

As with our last survey (see *CHOICE*, April 2009), budget carrier Tiger Airways received the lowest overall satisfaction score among the domestic airlines. About 20% of members who flew Jetstar, Qantas' budget subsidiary, nominated a good flight schedule as the main reason for choosing the carrier – but service was not among its drawbacks. Members who flew with Virgin Blue cited competitive airfares, best flight schedule and a good standard of service.

Qantas: Not the spirit of Australia

Compared with our last survey, members were more satisfied with Qantas' pricing and in-flight service – but still rated its service only marginally better than that of Jetstar and Tiger. According to CHOICE member Sandie, "Qantas have some rather bitchy flight attendants."

Several respondents who belong to the Qantas Frequent Flyer program believe the airline unfairly treats gold and platinum members more favourably than its regular members. "The spirit of egalitarian Australia? Not bloody likely!" comments Glyn.

Our previous survey cited several complaints about

Qantas' poor treatment of handicapped passengers, but such complaints did not emerge in this round.

Jetstar: Reliably unreliable

The low-cost Qantas offshoot has a new consumer charter citing safety as its first priority, which is especially important given that the Australian Transport Safety Bureau recently released details of its investigation into a bungled double-missed approach at Melbourne's Tullamarine Airport in 2007.

CHOICE members' biggest gripe with Jetstar is frequently delayed flights: "The only reliable thing about Jetstar is that it will depart late," says Declan. But Janet takes a different view: "The in-flight service was the best I have ever experienced. We were very impressed with the staff."

Members' other major gripe is Jetstar's cramped seating. "If you're more than six feet tall, you'll be in constant pain as the seats are too close together," warns Derek. Members also found Jetstar's web check-in service confusing.

Tiger: Budget prices, budget service

In our previous survey, most member complaints around Tiger Airways related to flight delays. Little has changed – delays without explanation and slow check-in processes continue to grate with members.

Those travelling to or from Melbourne (the airline's Australian hub is at Tullamarine) bore the brunt of Tiger's infrastructural shortcomings. Says Ashley: "The check-in staff

HOW WE SURVEY

About 11,000 members rated how satisfied they were with the domestic airline they'd flown with most recently in the previous year.

DOMESTIC AIRLINE SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS

Airline (in order of overall satisfaction score; the number of replies is listed in brackets – not all questions were answered)	Overall score (%)	Cost	In-flight service	In-flight entertainment	Seat comfort	Lag room	Food quality	Redeeming frequent flyer / loyalty points	Timeliness of flight (departing / arriving on time)	Baggage allowance	Check-in process
Virgin Blue (1514 - 3485)	73	★★★★	★★★★	★★☆	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Rex (77 - 201)	71	★★★	★★★★	★★☆	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Qantas (3701 - 5125)	68	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★
Jetstar (863 - 2044)	60	★★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★ (A)	★★★★	★★★★	★★★
Tiger Airways (194 - 533)	56	★★★	★★★	★★	★★★	★★★	★★	na	★★★	★★★	★★★

RATING SYSTEM ○ 0-10% ★ 11-20% ★★ 21-30% ★★★ 31-40% ★★★★ 41-50% ★★★★★ 51-60% ★★★★★ 61-70% ★★★★★ 71-80% ★★★★★ 81-90% ★★★★★ 91-100%

TABLE NOTES na Not applicable – Tiger Airways does not have a frequent flyer/loyalty scheme. (A) Jetstar is a partner of the Qantas Frequent Flyer program.

were rude, extremely strict on baggage allowance and only accepted cash for excess luggage. The long walk to baggage collection is a fenced off and outdoors – we felt like livestock.”

However, many members who flew with the airline were realistic. Says one member: “You get what you pay for – Tiger is a basic, no-frills carrier, but is very cheap. Because I fly quite regularly to visit family interstate, Tiger is the best compromise for me.”

Virgin Blue: Victorious again

Virgin Blue once again tops our member survey as the preferred domestic carrier. Overall, its satisfaction scores ranked first or second across the board.

In our last survey, many members slated Virgin's in-flight cheeriness as frivolous, but not this time. CHOICE member Murray, who flies interstate regularly, says: “The Virgin Blue people have always – and I mean always – given great service.” Virgin Blue also rated well with less able

passengers. “My husband is a 120kg paraplegic, and this airline gave service that we have only experienced in US,” says CHOICE member Gene. “They were attentive and professional under the stress of a late departure.”

But several members were not happy that Virgin's in-flight entertainment system was not working on some of its flights. “I travelled with a two-year-old, so it was a priority,” says one. “But it didn't work and was a disappointment.”

Rex: A touch of personal service

Rex (Regional Express), the only airline to fly to several regional destinations, scored the highest for in-flight service satisfaction. Many members praise its old-fashioned, personalised service. “Rex is the smallest airline but the best,” says CHOICE member Cathy. “The in-flight crew are always courteous; they give you a cuppa and a muffin, and a mint just before you land, plus they'll ring a taxi for you – and they always say goodbye as you leave the plane.” ■

CHOICE ONLINE

For more members' comments about domestic airlines, go to www.choice.com.au/domesticair. See CHOICE, April 2010 for the results of our international airlines satisfaction survey. The best travel agencies and websites will feature in our June issue.

DOMESTIC AIRLINES EXTRA COSTS

Airline (in alphabetical order)	Credit and / or debit card surcharge	Charge basis	Online check-in	Seat selection	Extra charge for children under two	Sports equipment (golf clubs, skis and surfboards)*	Check-in luggage maximum weight	Excess baggage charges at airport**
Jetstar	\$3.50	Per person per sector	✓	Standard: \$2; extra leg room: \$30	No	Free	20kg (E)	\$10 per extra kg
Qantas	\$7.70	Per person per booking	✓ (B)	Extra leg room: \$40 (C)	No	Free	23kg (F)	\$35 per extra 5kg
Rex (Regional Express)	Percentage of total booking price (A)	Per person per booking	✓ (G)	Available only at the airport. No charge for exit row	No	Free	15kg	\$3.30 per extra kg
Tiger Airways	\$6	Per person per sector		Standard: \$7; extra leg room: \$25	\$30	\$30	30kg (H)	\$15 per extra kg
Virgin Blue	\$3.50	Per person per sector	✓	Extra leg room: \$25-\$45	No	Free (D)	23kg (J)	\$10 per extra kg

TABLE NOTES * Must be within your baggage weight allowance. Airlines apply length restrictions between 1.9m and 3m. ** All charges are per person, per flight sector. (A) Surcharge between 1.76% and 3.98%, depending on the credit card. (B) Excludes Jetstar codeshare flights. (C) Non-Qantas Frequent Flyer (QFF) members must pay, but free for QFF (except Bronze class) members. (D) Virgin Blue allows an extra 5kg free when you have sporting equipment. (E) JetSaver Light fares: No allowance (extra \$40 for 20kg or \$80 at airport). JetFlex and JetSaver fares allow up to 20kg. (F) Must be bought before check-in, or else \$10 per kg at airport. Free additional weight for Qantas Frequent Flyer. (G) Only for those with e-tickets, without check-in luggage and who don't transfer between airlines. (H) Must be bought in advance online or at least 72 hours before departure – from \$15 for 15kg up to \$70 for 30kg – or \$50 for up to 15kg at the airport. (J) Allowance for passengers on Virgin Blue's Flexible fare. No check-in luggage allowance for passengers on GO fare! or BlueSaver fares, but 23kg allowance available for \$10 when booking online (for \$20 at the airport).



STORY ALAN DOOLEY

Get up, stand up

The free Financial Ombudsman Service can help you avoid going to court by resolving your complaints quickly and easily.

NUTSHELL

>> The Financial Ombudsman Service is a free one-stop shop for most financial complaints by consumers.

>> New terms of reference for the Ombudsman mean higher award limits and a quicker process for people who can't get the right result from a financial services provider.

The 2008/09 financial year was a big one for financial complaints – they rose by a third. The global financial downturn resulted in dramatic investment losses and people being locked into “frozen” fixed-interest investment funds that wouldn't allow withdrawals. And, when the Reserve Bank cut interest rates, borrowers in fixed-rate loans were paying much more than those on variable rates. When they tried to switch, the break costs (exit fees) quoted were astronomical – often tens of thousands of dollars – and the way fees were calculated wasn't clear. Also, extreme weather conditions led to more home insurance claims, with a significant number rejected by insurers.

Changes to the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) terms of reference, effective from January 2010, have improved the plight of consumers who have unresolved

grievances with banks, insurance companies or other financial service providers. The FOS is the amalgamation of several previous complaints schemes, effectively making it a free one-stop shop for complaints.

There's almost no downside for anyone taking a complaint to an approved external dispute resolution scheme such as the Ombudsman. It's a free service, and you may even help identify a problem affecting thousands of people. Last year, 81 systemic issues were identified and resolved by the FOS.

The Financial Ombudsman's Recommendations are binding on a company if the consumer accepts the outcome, but if you don't like the outcome it's not binding on you – you can still take a separate legal action. While your dispute is being dealt with, the company you're complaining about cannot begin or continue with legal proceedings, pursue you for debt

CASE STUDY

Led astray by the bank

Fiona Hitchcock's car was written off following an accident five years ago. It was insured, but there was a loan amount outstanding. When she asked about the process for clearing the remaining loan after her insurance payment was received, the bank told Fiona she could view the insurance payout as an advance loan repayment and simply make further repayments as she wished.

“Six months later, I received a nasty letter saying the bank had the right to take my money out of

my account for the outstanding debt,” Fiona says. “I withdrew all the money from that account, which was used to cover my rent. And on the advice of a community financial adviser, I complained to the Financial Ombudsman Service on the basis that misleading information was provided by the bank.”

“Soon after that, the bank conveniently ‘remembered’ that I had income protection insurance (Fiona had stopped working full-time some months before the accident due to ill health).

They paid out my debts and reimbursed me with about \$10,000.

“The bank's customer service representative couldn't believe the insurance department had made the payment – apparently this rarely happens. I had almost ended up broke, homeless and in court. What gets me is I never had an overdue debt, and when I did run into trouble I was treated like a vagrant.”



recovery or take action to recover debts that are the subject of the dispute. You also cannot be sued for defamation for what you say about the company to the Ombudsman, and any information obtained during the process cannot be used by either party in subsequent court proceedings, unless required by an appropriate court process.

New limits

The Ombudsman can now investigate complaints worth up to \$500,000 and award a maximum of \$280,000 for all disputes, except:

- Investments: \$150,000 (\$280,000 from 2012).
- General insurance broking: \$100,000 (\$150,000 from 2012).
- Life insurance income streams: \$6700 per month (\$7500 from 2012).
- Uninsured third-party motor vehicle claims: \$3000.

Complaints must be lodged with the Ombudsman within six years of you becoming aware (or should have been reasonably aware) of suffering a loss. If you've already received a response from the financial company's internal dispute resolution (IDR) scheme, the limit for an Ombudsman complaint is two years. ■

DID YOU KNOW?

IDR black hole

Consumers getting lost in a company's internal dispute resolution "black hole" is a problem often quoted by financial counsellors and lawyers. "In one matter, my client had consumer credit insurance for a personal and housing loan," says Loretta Kreet of Queensland Legal Aid. "He'd written 20 letters of complaint to the company between 2004 and 2009, with no response to nine of the letters. It took the insurance company until 2009 to tell him about their IDR scheme."

Kreet cites another case of a consumer, subject to a bankruptcy claim, forced into a "predatory" loan that effectively doubled his debt. "If the company had done the right thing and referred his case to the Financial Ombudsman, he would have received help," she says.

CONTACTS

- **Financial Ombudsman Service**
www.fos.org.au, 1300 780 808, info@fos.org.au
- **Credit Ombudsman Service Limited**
www.cosl.com.au, 1800 138 422, info@cosl.com.au
- **Superannuation Complaints Tribunal**
www.sct.gov.au, 1300 780 808, info@sct.gov.au

FIVE STEPS FOR USING THE FINANCIAL OMBUDSMAN

Step 1: Lodge a complaint

The first step is to lodge an official complaint with the company's internal dispute resolution (IDR) scheme. You have two options – contact the company directly, or contact the Ombudsman. CHOICE recommends registering your complaint with the Ombudsman first, which will then refer the complaint to the company on your behalf. Consumer lawyers often cite difficulties people have in finding the contact details for companies' internal dispute resolution schemes (see IDR Black Hole, below left); the Ombudsman can now provide all such details of its members and they're available on the FOS website. The company has 45 days to resolve the complaint without Ombudsman involvement.

Step 2: Ombudsman dispute form

If the company doesn't resolve your complaint within 45 days, you should lodge a dispute form with the Ombudsman and supply all supporting documentation and information. The Ombudsman's office will assess whether the dispute is within its terms of reference; if it is, the Ombudsman will refer the dispute to the company, which has 21 days to resolve the dispute with the consumer, or to provide a response to the Ombudsman.

Step 3: Ombudsman intervention

If the issue is still unresolved, the Ombudsman will review and may use negotiation and conciliation to reach a resolution, or give an initial view that may resolve the dispute. Ideally, a resolution will be reached without requiring a formal decision, provided both parties are satisfied. Otherwise, the Ombudsman will investigate the dispute in more detail and collect information and documentation from both parties.

Step 4: Recommendation or Determination

The Ombudsman has the power to make a Recommendation, which is a written decision. If both parties choose to accept the Recommendation within 30 days, the dispute is resolved. Otherwise, either party can ask the Ombudsman to make a Determination, which is a final written decision that's binding on the company if the consumer accepts it within 30 days.

Step 5: Going to court

You don't have to accept the Determination – but if you don't, the Ombudsman cannot help you any further. If a dispute is decided by the Ombudsman, the company must abandon any legal proceedings inconsistent with that decision.

CHOICE FRONTS UP AT THE FOS

Jenni Mack, Chairperson of CHOICE, is on the Board of the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) and chairs its Banking & Finance Advisory Committee.

Uta Mihm, CHOICE Senior Content Producer, is a consumer representative on the FOS General Insurance Advisory Committee.



STROLLERS • COTS • CAR RESTRAINTS • NAPPIES • HIGHCHAIRS • BABY MONITORS • and more

This independent 240-page guide has just been updated and contains the best baby products on the market as researched and tested by **CHOICE** experts.

The guide also offers advice on safety around the home, plus many other issues confronting new parents such as bedtime, feeding, childcare, immunisation, SIDS and postnatal depression.

Call **1800 069 552**
(Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm AEST)
and quote **E510/MAG** to order your copy.

CHOICE team

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Nick Stace.

Executive assistant Georgina Saltos.

CHIEF OF STAFF Natalie O'Toole.

COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR George Perry.

PRODUCT CONTENT & TESTING Michael Hohl (Director).

DIGITAL HOME Chris Ruggles (Team Leader), Denis Gallagher, Scott O'Keefe,

Ryan Shaw, James Thomson. **HOUSEHOLD** Chris Barnes (Team Leader), Antonio

Bonacruz, Rebecca Gatto, Peter Horvath, Fiona Mair. **WHITEGOODS** Matthew

Steen (Team Leader), Graham Byrne, Corinna Horrigan, Mohamed Jawahir,

Martha Psiroukis, Petr Valouch. **FACILITY & SUPPORT** John Ashes (Manager),

Klaus Neuscheler (Lab manager). **BUYING** Dorothy Kneale, Sonja Scodeller.

PRODUCT RESEARCH Christine Shaday, Joe Sydney, Elizabeth Toumasatos.

PRODUCT VERIFICATION Sharon Cauduro, Pam Gardiner.

SERVICES & RESEARCH INFORMATION

Anny Friis (Publisher), Karina Bray, Kate Browne, Rachel Clemons, Anne Dooley,

Tanya Fong, Cecilia Lee, Uta Mihm, David Oakenfull. **SERVICES & RESEARCH**

VERIFICATION Hannah Grew. **CONTENT EDITING** Sam Butler (Manager).

Anne Lawton. **DESIGN & PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT** Rein Vogel (Creative

Director), Kate Dougan, Gene Ross, Phasathorn Woottiaraporn, Danny Wynne.

CHOICE ONLINE Kim Hogan (Digital Director), Isobel King,

Seth Mortensen, Jason Ranieri, Katrina Zivkovich.

BUSINESS OPERATIONS

FINANCE Vivien Power (Manager), Leonie Sly, Lydia Youssef.

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

Stephen Macdonald (Manager), Charles Ly, Boris Reznitsky.

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

CONSUMER INSIGHTS Sandra Hart (Manager), Ange Moir.

CONSUMER SERVICES Daniel Sanese (Manager), David Hill, Mark McIntyre,

Silvana Ristevska, Piki Vaifale-Muliaga. **SUBSCRIPTIONS** Nootaya

Hwang (Supervisor), Thelma Bracken, Lynda-Maree Morgan, Fiona Pollard.

MARKETING Steve Thompson (Manager), Katherine Gattfield.

CAMPAIGNS & COMMUNICATIONS

Christopher Zinn (Director), David Howarth, Clare Hughes, Marni Switzer.

AWARDS & PARTNERSHIPS Linda Magee.

HUMAN RESOURCES Melissa Teoh.

Marketing statistics supplied by GfK Marketing Services.

"No commercial use" policy Our ratings and reports may not be used in advertising or for any other commercial purpose. CHOICE will take all steps to prevent commercial use of its materials, its name, and the name of its publications and products. Please report any apparent violation to CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204; phone 02 9577 3399; fax 02 9577 3355; email ausconsumer@choice.com.au.

Permissions Reproduction of CHOICE CHOICE Books and other CHOICE publications, in whole or in part, is forbidden without prior written permission (and is never permitted for commercial purposes). Address requests to CHOICE Consumer Services at the above address.

Your privacy We're committed to protecting your privacy, and abide by Australia's National Privacy Principles. We never sell or give our mailing lists to other organisations. Our privacy policy is on our website, otherwise we can send you a copy.

All literary and artistic works and compilations of information are the subject of Australian and international copyright. © Australian Consumers' Association 2007. CHOICE™ is a trademark of the Australian Consumers' Association. All rights reserved.

COUNCIL MEMBERS The Australian Consumers' Association is governed by an honorary council elected by the voting members. (For information about voting membership, call 02 9577 3399.) Members of the council give their time without reimbursement.

COUNCIL: Chair Jenni Mack. Members Charles Berger, Peter Bray, Rachel Dixon, Sandra Milligan, Frank Muller, Nicole Rich, Ian Spight.

The Australian Consumers' Association is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. ACN 301 381 925 ABN 72 001 381 925. Registered office: 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204, Australia.

YES!

**I would like to subscribe
to CHOICE magazine
(please tick box):**

CHOICE BINDERS

☐ \$17 (holds 12)

PERSONAL SUBSCRIPTION

☐ \$82 (1 year - 11 issues) ☐ \$153 (2 year - 22 issues)

PROFESSIONAL/INSTITUTION

☐ \$132 (1 year - 11 issues) ☐ \$253 (2 year - 22 issues)

MY DETAILS: (First name / Last name)

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss

Address

Postcode

Phone

Home

Work

Mobile

Email

GIFT RECIPIENT DETAILS: (First name / Last name)

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss

Address

Postcode

Please send gift renewal notice to me ☐ Yes ☐ No

Gift message:

PAYMENT DETAILS:

I wish to pay by: ☐ Cheque ☐ Money Order (please make payable to CHOICE)

OR Please debit my Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Amex ☐ Diners Club ☐

Cardholder's name

Card number



Expiry date

Cardholder's signature

This form may be used as a tax invoice. Prices include 10% GST.

CHOICE | 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204 ABN 72 000 281 925 ACN 000 281 925.

J1286

HOW TO REPLY



POST IT FREE

**CHOICE, Reply Paid 63261
Marrickville NSW 2204**



FAX TO

(02) 9577 3355



PHONE

**1800 069 552
9am-5pm Mon-Fri (AEST)
Quote code INS/CH10**



ONLINE

www.choice.com.au/magazines

CHOICE magazine

CHOICE keeps you in the know when you're looking for the best value.

We exhaustively test a wide range of products and present our findings in easy-to-read reports so you can save time and money.

From whitegoods to car insurance, groceries to TVs - whatever you're buying, CHOICE can help you make the right decision.

Join now! Turn overleaf for details

Subscriber benefits

- + Free delivery to your home or office
- + Access to CHOICE Shopper
- + Discounts on other CHOICE subscriptions

'Green Buy' recommendations

WHAT TO BUY

GREEN BUY



75% Washing machine A

PRICE PER SIZE kg
TYPE: Front loader
GOOD POINTS

Clear ratings

BEST BUY



74% Washing machine B

PRICE PER SIZE kg
TYPE: Front loader
GOOD POINTS

'Best Buy' recommendations



73% Washing machine C

PRICE PER SIZE kg
TYPE: Front loader
GOOD POINTS

In-depth product testing

ABOUT THE TEST

The tests on page 42 summarise the performance scores, features and specifications for all the models tested. The following explains why this range of the newly tested models doesn't make it into the What to Buy list.

Washer A, Washer B and the new Washer C model are gentle on clothes and score very well for water efficiency and score very well for noise performance, with the others getting poor scores. The B model has the

fastest normal cycle time for a front loader at 48 minutes. The Washer A, Washer B and Washer C do not have a 10 min quick wash but the Washer B and Washer C have good dirt

and water efficiency scores, but are down to poor goodness and energy efficiency scores.

Washer D has very good water and energy efficiency scores, but is let down by its noise performance.

The Washer E is very good for dirt removal and rinsing, but is let down by its energy efficiency scores.

68 pages of independent reviews

WWW.CHOICE.COM.AU ABOUT US P1



choice

Make the right one

How to use this index

A full index, with links to articles, from 2002 onwards can be found at www.choiceextra.com.au
(see instructions, below right) **Bold** type indicates a product test, member survey or user trial report.
Unbolded type indicates a CHOICE Research report. * Indicates an update, addition or correction.

Air conditioners		video recorders	Apr	Heaters		Pet insurance	Jun
large split-system	Oct, Apr	Dishwasher detergents	Jul	electric	Jun	Phones	
portable	Nov	Dishwashers	Jul, Feb	gas	May	camera	Jun
Airlines, update	Apr, May	Diy tools	Apr	Home & contents insurance	Nov, Feb*	cordless landline	Aug, Feb
ANCAP update	May	Doctor/patient relationships	May	Home theatre systems	Dec/Jan	smart	Oct
Appliance reliability	May	Domestic airlines	May	Hospital insurance	Aug	Phone cards	Oct
		Drills, cordless	Sep			Pizzas	Apr
		DVD recorders	Oct	Insurance		Plastic food containers	Feb
		DVRs	Apr	car	Feb	Pool fences	Jun
Babies and children				health, extras & combined	Sep	Potatoes, frozen products	Jul
change tables	Jun			home & contents	Nov, Feb*	Pressure cleaners	Feb
children's bikes	Dec/Jan	Electricity providers	May	hospital	Aug	Printers	
children's products	Sep	Eskies	Dec/Jan	life	Mar	all-in-one	Mar
coats	Oct	Espresso machines	Mar	pet	Mar	colour laser	Feb
strollers	Nov			travel	May		
Banking		Family tree software	May	international airlines	Apr	Radios, digital	Jul, Apr
low-fee accounts	Apr	Fans, ceiling	Sep	ISPs	Nov	Refrigerators - see Fridges	
Satisfaction	Oct	Fines, driving	Oct	billing	Nov	Reverse mortgages	Oct
Barbecues, gas hooded	Dec/Jan	Food		satisfaction	Nov		
Benetton mixers	Aug	bread, wholegrain	May			Screening tests, health	Apr
Bikes		coffee, ground	Dec/Jan	Jams and fruit spreads	Jun	Set-top boxes	Feb
children's	Dec/Jan	endorsement schemes	May*	Juicers	Jul	Shares	Apr
children's seats, trailers	Jul	frozen potato products	Jul			Shelf-stable meals	Feb
Blankets, electric	Jul	genetic modification	Mar	Knife sharpeners	Jul	Shonkys, The	Nov
Body fat scales	Nov	mayonnaise	Nov			Shopping, psychology tricks	Apr
Breakfast cereals	Jun*	milk	Sep	Landline phones	Aug, Feb	Simmer sauces	Aug
Breakfasters, personal	Sep	organic meat	Aug	Laptop computers	Feb	Smartphones	Feb
Broadband billing	Mar	plastic containers	Apr	Laser printers, colour	Feb	Social media	Mar
		shelf-stable meals	Feb	Laundry detergents	Nov	Software, family tree	May
Camcorders		simmer sauces	Aug	Lawnmowers	Nov	Solar (PV) panels	Aug
Cameras, compact	Sep	stock, chicken	Oct	Legal billing	Aug	Sparkling wine	Dec/Jan
zoom lenses	Aug	sugar	May	Lenses, zoom	Aug	Speaker docks	Jun
Camera phones	Jun	takeaway meals	Jun	Life insurance	Mar	Steady energy	Oct
Cars		tomatoes	Oct	Low-fee bank accounts	Feb	Stock, chicken	Oct
driving fines	Oct	trans fats	Jul	Loyalty cards	Feb	Strollers	Nov, Dec/Jan*
GPS	Dec/Jan, May	Food endorsement schemes	Mar			Superannuation	Jun
insurance	Feb	Food processors	Sep	Mayonnaise	Nov	Supermarkets	
safety testing	Mar	Food steamers	Nov	Meat, organic	Nov	psychology	Apr
types	Jul	Four-slice toasters	Apr	Media players (MP3s)	Aug	survey	Dec/Jan
Ceiling fans	Sep	Freezers, chest	Aug	Medications	Sep		
Cereals, breakfast	Jun*	Fridges	Sep, Apr	Milk	Feb	Takeaway meals	Jun
Change tables	Jun	Frypans, non-stick	May	Microfibre cloths	Jun, Mar	Tax tips	Jun
Chemicals		funerals	Feb	Microwave ovens	Oct	Telephones - see Phones	
cockroach killers	Oct			Mineral foundations	Sep	Televisions	
CHOICE		Gardening, sustainable	Sep	Mini hi-fi	Aug		Jun
50th anniversary	Apr	Gastric banding	Feb	Mixers, benchtop	May	66cm	Jun
Awards	Apr	Genetically modified food	Mar	Mobile phones	Jun, May	81cm	Mar
Christmas gifts	Dec/Jan	Glycaemic index	Jun	Money	Oct	94cm	May
Clothes dryers	May	Goggles, swimming	Dec/Jan	banking survey	Oct	117cm	Sep
Clothing sizes	Jun	GP's	Jun	commission refunders	Nov	Toasters, four-slice	Sep
Cockroach killers	Oct	handheld	Jun	complaints resolution	May	Toddler products	Apr
Commission refunders	Nov	in-car	Dec/Jan, May	electricity costs	May	Tomatoes	Oct
Computers, laptops	Oct	Grocery shopping online	Mar	legal billing	Aug	Toothpaste	Aug
Coffee grinders	Sep	Ground coffee	Dec/Jan	options trading	Sep	Trans fats	Jul
Coffee, ground	Dec/Jan	Gyms	May	reverse mortgages	Oct	Travel insurance	May
Consumer complaining	Feb	cheap home	Nov	tax tips	Jul	Types	Jul
Cooktops, induction	Apr			Nappies	May	Vacuum cleaners	Jul, Nov, Feb
Consumer survey	Jul	Hair dryers	Aug	Novelty cooking gadgets	Dec/Jan	bag/bin	Jun
Cordless drills	Sep	Handheld GPS	May			Variouse veins	
Cordless landline phones	Aug, Feb	Headphones, noise-cancelling	Jun				
Cosmetics		Health		Online		Washing machines	Aug, Mar
and chemicals	Oct	cheap home gyms	Nov	claiming	Feb	Weddings	Dec/Jan
mineral foundations	Jul	cold & flu remedies	May	grocery shopping	Mar	Will kits	Apr
Cots	Oct	doctor/patient relationships	Feb	retailers	Nov	Wine, sparkling	Dec/Jan
Credit cards, interest	Mar	gastric banding	Feb	shop & swap	Sep	Wireless technology	Jun
Cross trainers	Oct	heart care	May	Options trading	Aug		
		medications	Aug	Organic meat	Sep	Yoghurt, premium	Oct
Dentistry	Nov	myths	Dec/Jan	Ovens	Oct		
Digital		screening tests	Apr	double	Oct	Zoom lenses	Aug
cameras, compact	Sep, Mar	Heart rate monitors	Dec/Jan	microwave	Jun		
photo frames	Oct, Apr						
radios	Jul, Apr						

Contact us



SUBSCRIBERS' HELPLINE

Contact us for advice on all consumer issues.

Phone 02 9577 3399

Fax 02 9577 3377

SUBSCRIPTION PRICES

Personal subscription

One year \$82, two years \$153.

Companies/institutions

One year \$132, two years \$253.

EMAIL US

Send in your questions for our experts to answer or just share your consumer experiences.

Email

ausconsumer@choice.com.au

WRITE TO US

CHOICE

57 Carrington Road,
Marrickville 2204

USE CHOICE SHOPPER

Call 1300 360 655

All you need is the model name and number of what you want to buy, the price you want to beat, and your CHOICE subscriber number (from the mailing label with the magazine).

USE CHOICE EXTRA

www.choiceextra.com.au

Free website with CHOICE articles from Jan/Feb 2002, with links to PDFs of many of them for quick and easy reference. No need to search for that back copy! To use this website, log in with your subscriber number.

JOIN CHOICE.COM.AU

For an extra \$11.50/qr, CHOICE magazine subscribers can access hundreds of test reports and articles on finance, food, health, computing, cars, and products and services for babies. You'll also find interactive tools to help you choose products. Go to www.choiceextra.com.au and follow the prompts to subscribe.

HARD WORD

The winners of this month's best entry are all those who told us that 'expensive' isn't really a good point – give yourselves a pat on the back. Thanks also to D. Beath, J. McInnes, D. Drummy, R. Palmer, R. Blierton, B. McLeod and E. Roddam for their contributions to this month's Hard Word. If you have any examples you think deserve to be on this page, send them to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the unmarked originals.

"Our free workshops will help you D.I.Y. and save"

SATURDAY 16TH FEBRUARY
Time: How to change fly screens
2pm: How to lay carpet

SUNDAY 16TH FEBRUARY
Time: Water saving dripper systems
2pm: How to build a planter box

SATURDAY 20TH FEBRUARY
Time: How to maintain your power garden tools
2pm: How to maintain your swimming pool

SUNDAY 21ST FEBRUARY
Time: How to install a roof vent
2pm: How to build a timber deck

SATURDAY 27TH FEBRUARY
Time: How to apply render
2pm: How to install firewood fencing

SUNDAY 28TH FEBRUARY
Time: Paint techniques
2pm: How to install a leaking tap

SATURDAY 4TH MARCH
Time: How to create a wet area
2pm: Build a seating wall

SUNDAY 5TH MARCH
Time: How to lay ceramic wall tiles
2pm: How to lay ceramic floor tiles



11am: Paint techniques
2pm: How to install a leaking tap

Visit www.bunnings.com.au for all D.I.Y. workshop information.

HALLOWEEN SPECIAL?

The pharmaceutical choice
Recommended for the appearance of scars & stretch marks



Bio Oil 60ml
Also available in 125ml or 200ml

\$9.69

SAVE \$5.30

QUALITY CONTROL HAS SPRUNG A LEAK ...

Drumming up future business for their plumber mates?



VISIT THE FISHMONGER INSTEAD?

It would take a fair amount of work to form this anchovy paste into something resembling the serving suggestion.



AGAIN WITH THE BOWELS!

Let's get this clear once and for all: food in bowl goes in; food in bowl goes out.



SAVE 30%

On All SPINIFLEX Enamel Plates, Bowls & Mugs

adventure club price

AND SPEAKING OF QUALITY CONTROL ...

We're not perfect – the good folk at CHOICE produced this howler. We usually limit our Hard Word page to packaging, marketing and advertising bumph, but, since this one comprised almost half the Hard Word entries this month, we thought we'd give it a run!

WORTH BUYING



64% WORTH BUYING



63% WORTH BUYING



62% WORTH BUYING

Present this SHOP-A-DOCKET® offer for
15% OFF ALL PURCHASES

AT ALL **pulse PHARMACY** People. Passion. Price.

Newcastle Shop Stop New Centre
Central Shopping Centre
Geelong West 1/5-1/7
Parkington St &
Shop 1 & 6 Parkington Strand
Warrnambool 1/1-1/300 Princess Rd

SO, NOT QUITE ALL PURCHASES....

*AVAILABLE AT ALL PULSE PHARMACY STORES. NOT VALID WITH ANY OTHER OFFERS, SPECIALS AND EVERY DAY LOW PRICED PRODUCTS. EXCLUDES NAPPIES, BABY FORMULAS, PRESCRIPTIONS, HAIR COLOURS, PHOTO PROCESSING, DRY CLEANING, MET CARDS & TATTS. EXCLUDES ONLINE PURCHASES. VALID UNTIL 13-02-2010.

physical power switch than using standby mode.

GOOD POINTS

• Most expensive TV on test.